

A Holistic Medicine Triangle Used in Workers' Compensation Utilization Review

Holistic medicine is frequently thought of as a form of healing that considers the whole person including body, mind, spirit, and emotions in the quest for optimal health and wellness. According to the holistic medicine philosophy, one can achieve optimal health by gaining proper balance in life.

However, what place does this philosophy have in Workers' Compensation? There is a variation of the philosophy that very much applies in Workers' Compensation, particularly as it relates to the physician review component of the Utilization Review process. Some of the most effective physicians who provide medical opinions as a part of the Utilization Review process consider three key holistic points in their basements: the physical, mental, and environmental circumstances of the patient.

The physical piece is their overall physical condition and generally the physical injury itself. The mental piece considers their psychological condition including things like if the patient has a history of depression, anxiety, and/or stress-related disorders etc. The environmental piece includes things like working conditions, including if the patient works indoors or outdoors; climate conditions; climbing stairs at home or work; working on ladders or in dangerous situations.

It is important that these three things be considered in the assessment of medical necessity, not only in determining if the request should be a certified or not, but also from the perspective of what's in the best interest of the patient

from an outcomes perspective. For example:

- **Indicated Surgery with History of Depression:** A patient that meets all physical criteria may need back surgery but has a history of depression. In such a case, it could be beneficial to have a psychological evaluation performed before surgery to prevent other complications that could adversely impact the overall outcome. This type of patient may have unrealistic expectations for the surgery or may not participate in post-operative care.
- **Indicated Surgery with a Request for a Hospital Bed:** A patient that meets all physical criteria for back surgery may have a hospital bed recommended for approval if they are not able to navigate in their home to another floor to sleep. The opposite may be true if their bedroom is on the same level as the living space thereby not requiring a hospital bed.
- **Knee Surgery for a Firefighter:** A patient that meets all physical criteria for surgery except as it relates to conservative treatments may still have the surgery certified depending on their profession. These patients may have such a significant injury that conservative care would not provide a realistic level of improvement to allow resumption of their work.

In each of these examples, there are times when the requested procedure may be appropriate from strictly a physical perspective. However, other factors may be in play that could result in a less than desirable

outcome for both the patient and the payor perspectives. To maximize the opportunity of the best outcome, the other two points of the holistic triangle may need to be addressed.

It should be comforting to know that the medical necessity analysis reaches far beyond a simple approved/denied perspective and that the bigger picture gets taken into account that is ultimately in the best interest of the patient.