



OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT TOOLS ADVISORY: INTRODUCTION

Overview

This clinical advisory provides an introduction to Outcomes Assessment Tools (OATs) that can be helpful to integrative healthcare (IH) providers. A commonly used assessment tool for pain is presented. References and further information are provided.

Outcomes Assessment in Integrative Healthcare Practice

The number one concern of patients is, “Can you help me?” They want clear understandable communication from the healthcare provider, a thorough examination/evaluation, a diagnosis/cause of their condition, information about treatment and self-help, and most of all, relief. While in some conditions the relief that a patient experiences is obvious – for example, decreased pain, with other conditions, especially chronic ones, relief can be more difficult to measure. Other stakeholders are also interested in the effect of the treatments, such as insurers that are paying for treatment. Patients may be satisfied that they are “feeling better” however, the ability to measure or quantify “how much better” can be helpful in demonstrating the effectiveness of your care plan to the patient, their family, a payer, an attorney, or other parties.

Validated tools in the form of patient-reported outcome measures, OATs are a quick and easy way to provide the objective evidence of progress everyone is seeking. When used properly, OATs don’t mean more charting for a provider and they can gather critical information from patients that will help providers manage the patient’s care based on their outcomes.

OATs can evaluate many things, but three common domains include pain, function, and general health. There are numerous validated tools that focus on one or more of these domains and all are readily available for use in clinical practice. There are three critical steps that need to be followed when establishing an outcomes-based practice. These are as follows:

- Know which outcome tools to implement and how to score them properly.
- Repeat the use of the tools at appropriate times and compare the scores over time.
- Most importantly, make clinical decisions based on the results.

CHP’s Provider Hub has additional information about and/or links to several validated OATs that are easily incorporated into any IH providers practice.