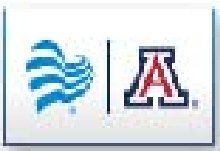




Care Pathways: A Pragmatic Approach to Enhancing Spine Care Cost Savings and Improving Patient

Outcomes

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Introduction

Sharp increases in health costs pose an unsustainable economic burden to the healthcare system. Several factors place spine surgery at the forefront of the healthcare debate. These include high utilization and procedure costs, increasing demand given the aging population, and significant limitations in access to care. Care pathways have consistently shown potential to promote access to high quality, interdisciplinary interventions, resulting in reduced costs, increased efficiency, and decreased wait times, ultimately improving patient outcomes and increasing overall satisfaction. The aim of this review is to investigate existing approaches, including clinical care pathways, triage, and referral strategies and to analyze the feasibility of applying these initiatives in spine surgery.

Methods

A search of electronic healthcare databases was conducted, including PubMed/ Medline and Web of Science, limited to manuscripts published between January 1980 and December 2014. Articles assessing multidisciplinary care pathways, triage, referral practices, and cost containment (reduced imaging, specialty referrals, and surgeries) were included.



Results

Our search yielded 33 pertinent care pathway, referral, triage strategy, and cost containment articles spanning multiple specialties; 17 were neurosurgical or orthopedic spine studies. Five articles described four spine care pathways; 1 implemented an initial psychiatry visit, found to significantly reduce costs in another study; 1 suggested instituting a primary care spine practitioner. Mandatory psychiatry consultation decreased surgical referrals by almost 50%. Protocols triaging patients to the most appropriate physician improved surgeon morale, appealing to their expertise and skill level. Unfortunately, these pathways are difficult to initiate, requiring capital, protocol development, implementation, and heightened cooperation among multi-disciplinary professionals.

Learning Objectives

By the conclusion of this session, participants should be able to: 1) Describe the importance of spine care pathways

Conclusions

Provision of the best surgical spine care will be dependent on a more streamlined approach to identify spinal surgery candidates, leading to less variability among referrals, fewer unnecessary referrals, and higher yield referrals to spine specialists. Prospective analyses are warranted to determine cost, utility, and efficacy of spine care pathways.