

Life Care Planning: Physiatry and Pediatric Rehabilitation

Life care planning for a pediatric subject who has become ill or injured requires specialized knowledge and expertise in order to properly evaluate and determine future medical requirements over the entire course of a subject's probable duration of care.

While all physicians who specialize in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (Physiatrists) receive specialized training in the care of pediatric patients, and while most these specialists include children in their day-to-day medical practice, some elect to enter the subspecialty of Pediatric Rehabilitation Medicine.

Physicians who specialize in Pediatric Rehabilitation Medicine gear the focus of their practices around the diagnosis and treatment, the prevention of complications, and the long-term management of conditions which are either congenital, which developed during childhood, or which are the result of injuries that in turn result in long-term or permanent medical conditions that affect compromised functional capacities.

Physiatrists understand normal physical growth and development, as well as cognitive and psychosocial development of children, and they are able to identify and contrast the impact of an illness or injury on normal childhood growth and development.

An effective life care plan requires that a thorough review all available medical records be conducted by a physician, as physicians are able to interpret, filter and understand the information contained in the records, so as to determine the significance of their objective findings and the opinions expressed by treating physicians.

A physician's capacity to perform medical examinations is, in most cases, outside the bounds of a non-physician's professional licensure. The capacity to perform medical examinations is extremely valuable important, as medical examinations are often necessary to establish proper medical foundations for diagnostic conclusions and recommendations for future care.

The importance of a physician examination of a Life Care Plan's subject is so meaningful, the Center for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) requires the performance of a medical examination by a Life Care Plan's authoring *physician*, as a prerequisite to accepting a Life Care Plan as a foundation for a Worker's Compensation Medicare Set-aside Allocation. One reason for this is the information obtained by a physician during an interview and examination can be processed through the unique information filter of physician interpretation that can, in turn, significantly impact a Life Care Plan's medical foundations.

Relative to all other medical specialties, physiatrists are particularly well suited to perform medical examinations for the types of cases which require Life Care Plans, as Physiatry is specifically geared towards the provision of holistic care and rehabilitation over time—exactly what a properly constructed Life Care Plan is designed to address.

Opinions regarding future medical need must have a sound medical foundation and the life care plan's author must have an understanding of the individual's condition and its impact in all spheres of growth, overall development, and function. Additionally, the physician must take into consideration the impact of the individual's condition once he/she reaches adulthood, as well as the subsequent impact of the aging process on any relevant medical conditions.

For a life care planner to achieve maximum effectiveness, he or she must accomplish the Clinical Objective of Life Care Planning:

1. Diminish or eliminate physical and psychological pain and suffering
2. Reach and maintain the highest level of function given an individual's unique circumstance
3. Prevent complications to which an individual's unique physical and mental conditions predispose them
4. Afford the individual the best possible quality of life in light of their condition.

Physicians who specialize in field of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (PM&R) are uniquely qualified to provide life care plans for individuals with chronic illnesses, injuries, and associated conditions and disabilities, as medical specialty of PM&R requires training in general medicine, orthopaedics, neurology, and rehabilitation medicine.

Common conditions which physiatrist treat and manage on a long term basis long-term include: complex orthopaedic conditions, acquired brain injury, spinal cord injury, brachial plexus, other peripheral nerve injuries, amputations, and visual and hearing impairment, among others.

According to the essential text, the Life Care Planning and Case Management Handbook, "For a Life Care Plan to appropriately provide for all the needs of an individual, the plan must have a strong medical foundation." It continues: "Physicians specializing in physical medicine and rehabilitation (physiatrists) are uniquely qualified to provide a strong medical foundation for life care planning based on their training and experience in providing medical and rehabilitative services to individuals with disabilities. Physiatrists are, by their training, experienced in dealing with individuals who have catastrophic functional problems. Additionally, physiatrists are trained to anticipate the long term needs of their patients."

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