

**CARF
Survey Report
for
VA Boston
Healthcare -
Spinal Cord
System of Care**

Organization

VA Boston Healthcare - Spinal Cord System of Care
1400 VFW Parkway
West Roxbury, MA 02132

Organizational Leadership

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Survey Dates

August 24-25, 2015

Survey Team

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Programs/Services Surveyed

Home and Community Services: Spinal Cord System of Care (Adults)
Inpatient Rehabilitation Programs - Hospital: Spinal Cord System of Care (Adults)
Interdisciplinary Outpatient Medical Rehabilitation Programs: Spinal Cord System of Care (Adults)

Previous Survey

July 12-13, 2012
Three-Year Accreditation

Survey Outcome

Three-Year Accreditation
Expiration: September 2018



Three-Year Accreditation

SURVEY SUMMARY

VA Boston Healthcare - Spinal Cord System of Care has strengths in many areas.

- VA Boston Healthcare - Spinal Cord System of Care offers an excellent, comprehensive Spinal Cord System of Care rehabilitation program that is well recognized in the community.
- Leadership, physicians, and staff are passionate about providing exceptional care and dedicated to delivering the best rehabilitation for the veterans served.
- The program benefits from the superb medical leadership. The Spinal Cord System of Care chief of staff/medical director is fully involved; provides leadership for the important clinical and administrative aspects of the program; and promotes best practice, patient-centered care, staff development, teaching, and research. There is also a strong core of physicians to support the mission of the program of enhancing the independence of veterans with spinal cord injuries.
- The Spinal Cord System of Care program has experienced staff committed to meeting the unique challenges of the VA and demonstrates a strong interdisciplinary approach for optimal outcomes for the veteran.
- The well-run family conference is weekly, is multidisciplinary, and keeps the veteran and family in the forefront and adjusted to their needs.
- The Peer Visitors Program is active and supports the rehabilitation and recovery process.
- The outpatient services demonstrate a commitment to integrated, lifelong care. The services are multidisciplinary, are enhanced through various specialty clinics, and focus on veteran health and wellness in addition to the rehabilitation. The virtual services via telehealth are another service strength of the program.
- Feedback from stakeholders is uniformly extremely positive about the care, the physicians, and the staff. Specifically, patients and families praised the competency and friendliness of staff and the progress they made because of the excellent and well-trained staff. They praise the commitment and professionalism of everyone and stated that they do not feel like a patient but “part of a community.”
- Referral sources are extremely satisfied with the caregivers, support services, and advocacy/ resources provided to veterans and families.
- The Other Side of the Bed program, where medical students assist with nursing care as health technicians, strengthens the teamwork by obtaining perspectives from the other side of the bed.
- The program has access to state-of-the-art technology and an excellent therapeutic pool.
- The program has a strong presence within the region and enjoys a well-respected history of clinical research and education in accomplishing lifelong functional clinical outcomes of veterans with spinal cord injuries.
- The program is complimented on its pet therapy services. The dogs that visit the veterans have limb loss and mobility challenges, and provide a special source of comfort and enjoyment. The dogs are a welcome distraction and can serve to reduce any stress or anxiety that accompanies the rehabilitation process.

- The rehabilitation program demonstrates excellent ongoing communications regarding progress of the veteran served. Both informal and formal systems are in place for timely information exchange with all of the team members. The strong collegial relationships among the team members help to enhance the effectiveness of the communication.
- The organization is recognized for providing ongoing organized educational opportunities to the staff, professional community, and veterans served in the New England area, including the annual Spinal Cord Injury Medicine Symposium and the Spinal Cord Injury Interdisciplinary Conference.
- The Fisher House, with its beautifully immaculate gardens, allows families to have a “home away from home” while their loved ones are receiving rehabilitation treatment.
- The Spinal Cord Injury program is recognized for its zero exclusion criteria for vocational rehabilitation and supportive employment services. One example of innovative vocational outcomes of a local veteran with high tetraplegia was being able to teach English to individuals in Japan using eye gaze technology and the internet.
- The Clinical Video Telehealth system is an expanding and important service that makes clinical follow-up, treatment, and monitoring more convenient for veterans served in the community, including the management of veterans with chronic pain.
- The spinal cord injury publication, *Catch the Spirit*, provides an attractive newsletter providing information on spinal cord injuries, related events, staff updates, resources, and the promotion of education and training. Also, the numerous awards, professional accomplishments, and recognition of the clinicians and physicians are featured.
- The unique position of service line engineer contributes to the strategic management of program services, identifies opportunities to improve services, and assists in improving staff's understanding of care needs and processes.
- The engineer and medical director for the Spinal Cord System of Care have developed an x-matrix to analyze the service line key measures in a model aligning strategic objectives and key patient processes, which is impressive.

VA Boston Healthcare - Spinal Cord System of Care should seek improvement in the area identified by the recommendation in the report. Consultation given does not indicate nonconformance to standards but is offered as a suggestion to further quality improvements.

On balance, VA Boston Healthcare - Spinal Cord System of Care is dedicated to providing high-quality, comprehensive healthcare to persons served in an environment that fosters respect, communication, and compassion. The organization has an area for improvement of conducting and analyzing unannounced tests of all emergency procedures. VA Boston Healthcare - Spinal Cord System of Care appears to have the ability and the willingness to make improvement in the area identified in this report.

VA Boston Healthcare - Spinal Cord System of Care has earned a Three-Year Accreditation. The organization is recognized for its efforts to provide quality rehabilitation services to veterans served with spinal cord injury. The organization is encouraged to address the opportunity for improvement noted in this report and to continue to use the CARF standards as guidelines for continuous process improvement.

SECTION 1. ASPIRE TO EXCELLENCE[®]

A. Leadership

Description

CARF-accredited organizations identify leadership that embraces the values of accountability and responsibility to the individual organization's stated mission. The leadership demonstrates corporate social responsibility.

Key Areas Addressed

- Leadership structure
 - Leadership guidance
 - Commitment to diversity
 - Corporate responsibility
 - Corporate compliance
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Recommendations

There are no recommendations in this area.

C. Strategic Planning

Description

CARF-accredited organizations establish a foundation for success through strategic planning focused on taking advantage of strengths and opportunities and addressing weaknesses and threats.

Key Areas Addressed

- Strategic planning considers stakeholder expectations and environmental impacts
 - Written strategic plan sets goals
 - Plan is implemented, shared, and kept relevant
-

Recommendations

There are no recommendations in this area.

D. Input from Persons Served and Other Stakeholders

Description

CARF-accredited organizations continually focus on the expectations of the persons served and other stakeholders. The standards in this subsection direct the organization's focus to soliciting, collecting, analyzing, and using input from all stakeholders to create services that meet or exceed the expectations of the persons served, the community, and other stakeholders.

Key Areas Addressed

- Ongoing collection of information from a variety of sources
 - Analysis and integration into business practices
 - Leadership response to information collected
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Recommendations

There are no recommendations in this area.

E. Legal Requirements

Description

CARF-accredited organizations comply with all legal and regulatory requirements.

Key Areas Addressed

- Compliance with all legal/regulatory requirements
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Recommendations

There are no recommendations in this area.

F. Financial Planning and Management

Description

CARF-accredited organizations strive to be financially responsible and solvent, conducting fiscal management in a manner that supports their mission, values, and annual performance objectives. Fiscal practices adhere to established accounting principles and business practices. Fiscal management covers daily operational cost management and incorporates plans for long-term solvency.

Key Areas Addressed

- Budget(s) prepared, shared, and reflective of strategic planning
 - Financial results reported/compared to budgeted performance
 - Organization review
 - Fiscal policies and procedures
 - Review of service billing records and fee structure
 - Financial review/audit
 - Safeguarding funds of persons served
-

Recommendations

There are no recommendations in this area.

G. Risk Management

Description

CARF-accredited organizations engage in a coordinated set of activities designed to control threats to their people, property, income, goodwill, and ability to accomplish goals.

Key Areas Addressed

- Identification of loss exposures
 - Development of risk management plan
 - Adequate insurance coverage
-

Recommendations

There are no recommendations in this area.

H. Health and Safety

Description

CARF-accredited organizations maintain healthy, safe, and clean environments that support quality services and minimize risk of harm to persons served, personnel, and other stakeholders.

Key Areas Addressed

- Inspections
 - Emergency procedures
 - Access to emergency first aid
 - Competency of personnel in safety procedures
 - Reporting/reviewing critical incidents
 - Infection control
-

Recommendations

H.7.a.(1)

H.7.b. through H.7.d.

Unannounced tests of all emergency procedures are conducted for fire on each shift. Currently the staff members are given 24 hours to complete the test. It is recommended that unannounced tests of all emergency procedures be conducted at least annually on each shift, including complete actual or simulated physical evacuation drills. The unannounced tests should be analyzed for performance that addresses areas needing improvement, actions to be taken, results of performance improvement plans, and necessary education and training of personnel and should be evidenced in writing.

I. Human Resources

Description

CARF-accredited organizations demonstrate that they value their human resources. It should be evident that personnel are involved and engaged in the success of the organization and the persons they serve.

Key Areas Addressed

- Adequate staffing
 - Verification of background/credentials
 - Recruitment/retention efforts
 - Personnel skills/characteristics
 - Annual review of job descriptions/performance
 - Policies regarding students/volunteers, if applicable
-

Recommendations

There are no recommendations in this area.

Consultation

- Although competencies for therapy are clearly delineated for working with veterans with spinal cord injury, it is suggested that nursing competencies for working with veterans with spinal cord injury also be clearly delineated to better determine that all nurses are competent in the care of veterans with spinal cord injury.
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J. Technology

Description

CARF-accredited organizations plan for the use of technology to support and advance effective and efficient service and business practices.

Key Areas Addressed

- Written technology and system plan
 - Written procedures for the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) in service delivery, if applicable
 - Training for personnel, persons served, and others on ICT equipment, if applicable
 - Provision of information relevant to the ICT session, if applicable
 - Maintenance of ICT equipment in accordance with manufacturer recommendations, if applicable
 - Emergency procedures that address unique aspects of service delivery via ICT, if applicable
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Recommendations

There are no recommendations in this area.

K. Rights of Persons Served

Description

CARF-accredited organizations protect and promote the rights of all persons served. This commitment guides the delivery of services and ongoing interactions with the persons served.

Key Areas Addressed

- Communication of rights
 - Policies that promote rights
 - Complaint, grievance, and appeals policy
 - Annual review of complaints
-

Recommendations

There are no recommendations in this area.

L. Accessibility

Description

CARF-accredited organizations promote accessibility and the removal of barriers for the persons served and other stakeholders.

Key Areas Addressed

- Written accessibility plan(s)
 - Requests for reasonable accommodations
-

Recommendations

There are no recommendations in this area.

M. Performance Measurement and Management

Description

CARF-accredited organizations are committed to continually improving their organizations and service delivery to the persons served. Data are collected and analyzed, and information is used to manage and improve service delivery.

Key Areas Addressed

- Information collection, use, and management
- Setting and measuring performance indicators

Recommendations

There are no recommendations in this area.

N. Performance Improvement**Description**

The dynamic nature of continuous improvement in a CARF-accredited organization sets it apart from other organizations providing similar services. CARF-accredited organizations share and provide the persons served and other interested stakeholders with ongoing information about their actual performance as a business entity and their ability to achieve optimal outcomes for the persons served through their programs and services.

Key Areas Addressed

- Proactive performance improvement
 - Performance information shared with all stakeholders
-

Recommendations

There are no recommendations in this area.

SECTION 2. THE REHABILITATION AND SERVICE PROCESS FOR THE PERSONS SERVED

A. Program/Service Structure for all Medical Rehabilitation Programs

Key Areas Addressed

- Scope of the program and services
- Admission and transition/exit criteria
- Team communication
- Provision of services to any persons who require ventilatory assistance

Recommendations

There are no recommendations in this area.

B. The Rehabilitation and Service Process for the Persons Served

Key Areas Addressed

- Scope of the program services
 - Appropriate placement in and movement through the continuum of services
 - Admission and ongoing assessments
 - Information provided to persons served for decision making
 - Team composition
 - Team responsibilities and communication
 - Medical director/physician providing medical input qualifications and responsibilities
 - Discharge/transition planning and recommendations
 - Family/support system involvement
 - Education and training of persons served and families/support systems
 - Sharing of outcomes information with the persons served
 - Physical plant
 - Records of the persons served
-

Recommendations

There are no recommendations in this area.

C. The Service Process for the Persons Served in Home and Community Services

Key Areas Addressed

- Appropriate placement in the continuum of service
- Admission and ongoing assessments
- Team composition

- Team responsibilities and communication
 - Records of the persons served
 - Provision of services to any children/adolescents
-

Recommendations

There are no recommendations in this area.

SECTION 3. PROGRAM STANDARDS

A. Comprehensive Integrated Inpatient Rehabilitation Program

Key Areas Addressed

- Preadmission assessment
- Privileging process
- Appropriate placement in the continuum of services
- Secondary prevention
- Rehabilitation nursing services
- Rehabilitation physician/medical services and management
- Program-specific information-gathering requirements
- Information gathering regarding durability of outcomes

Note: The relevant specialty program section of the report includes recommendations, consultation, and areas of exemplary conformance for all portions of Section 3 of the standards manual that were applied to the specialty program.

B. Outpatient Medical Rehabilitation Program

Key Areas Addressed

- Program-specific information-gathering requirements
- Personnel requirements
- Team composition

Note: The relevant specialty program section of the report includes recommendations, consultation, and areas of exemplary conformance for all portions of Section 3 of the standards manual that were applied to the specialty program.

C. Home and Community Services

Key Areas Addressed

- Knowledge and identification of appropriate community service options
- Person-centered individualized services
- Collaboration with the family/support system
- Personnel competencies
- Safety and disaster preparedness
- Education to persons served, family/support system, and other stakeholders

Note: The relevant specialty program section of the report includes recommendations, consultation, and areas of exemplary conformance for all portions of Section 3 of the standards manual that were applied to the specialty program.

J. Spinal Cord System of Care

Inpatient Rehabilitation Program - Hospital: Spinal Cord System of Care (Adults)

- Standards in Section 3.A. Comprehensive Integrated Inpatient Rehabilitation Program have been applied to this program.

Outpatient Medical Rehabilitation Program - Interdisciplinary: Spinal Cord System of Care (Adults)

- Standards in Section 3.B. Outpatient Medical Rehabilitation Program have been applied to this program.

Home and Community Services: Spinal Cord System of Care (Adults)

- Standards in Section 3.C. Home and Community Services have been applied to this program.

Key Areas Addressed

- Scope of services
- Continuum of services
- Admission and discharge/transition criteria
- Preadmission assessment
- Team composition
- Physician responsibilities
- Organized education program
- Community education and advocacy
- Consideration of lifelong follow-up care
- Role as a resource for other spinal cord programs
- Evidence of long-term positive outcomes
- Knowledge and application of clinical research to treatment practices

Note: Recommendations, consultation, and exemplary conformance in this section of the report include all portions of Section 3 of the standards manual that were applied to the specialty program.

Recommendations

There are no recommendations in this area.

Consultation

- Excellent research is conducted by medical staff and healthcare professionals in the Spinal Cord System of Care. Staff members are encouraged to continue to grow and expand the program's visibility through publishing and presenting of research, case studies, posters, and presentations.
 - The program could benefit from an electronic patient scheduling system to allow easy access to schedules and changes for everyone. The electronic patient scheduling system could also monitor patient treatment received and staff productivity.
 - Although staff is dedicated and committed to the Spinal Cord System of Care, it might be beneficial to find creative ways to retain nursing staff that is experienced in working with veterans with spinal cord injury and encourage achievement of certified rehabilitation registered nurse (CRRN) certification.
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