

5 Steps for a Successful Cost Containment Strategy

Taking a closer look at medications can result in cost-cutting measures that save facilities money without sacrificing quality; in fact, it may actually contribute to better outcomes. The key is collaboration between the prescriber, the pharmacist, and the care team at the facility.

“Soon after admission, the consultant pharmacist’s medication regimen review is an early opportunity to identify potential medication-related issues and savings on drug costs,” said Stephen Creasy, PharmD, director of clinical services at PharMerica.

5 Steps to Promote Cost-Containment, Quality Care

When a facility has a cost-containment strategy, it can help ensure that expenses are realistic and appropriate, medications regimens are up to date and monitored on an ongoing basis, and residents receive person-centered care that aligns with their goals, priorities, and preferences. Consider these steps to get a strong strategy started:

“Soon after admission, the consultant pharmacist’s medication regimen review is an early opportunity to identify potential medication-related issues and savings on drug costs.”

– Stephen Creasy,
PharmD, director of
clinical services at
PharMerica

- 1. Target polypharmacy.** Taking multiple prescription drugs not only adds to medication costs, but also increases the risk for adverse events that can lead to ER visits or hospitalizations. A resident’s healthcare team should consider altering the patient’s medication list to minimize polypharmacy while maintaining the therapeutic goals of treatment. Lean on your consultant pharmacist in this effort, who can evaluate if a medication is necessary, whether the benefits outweigh the risks, or if there is an opportunity to use patient-specific nonpharmacological interventions. If a resident is a candidate for deprescribing, employ a team-based approach to ensure proper planning, coordination, and monitoring of tapering effects.
- 2. Simplify med pass.** Talk to the nursing staff about what their concerns or issues are regarding med pass. What is taking the most time? Where are there opportunities for errors? What would make the process more efficient? “Communicate this information to the pharmacy. They can help you take a step back and look at things holistically,” said Creasy. They also can take small steps to make things more efficient. For instance, if nurses have to crush a pill, the pharmacy might be able to find a liquid equivalent or can identify combination medications that can do the job of two drugs.
- 3. Engrain cost-containment in the organizational culture.** Communicate with team members about how cost-containment efforts benefit residents and staff alike. Track data such as time spent on med pass, medication errors/adverse events, and ER visits and hospital admissions. Make sure staff understand the role they play in cost-containment and what skills and training they need. For instance, Creasy said, “We can work with nurses to address med pass activities that take more time, such as giving them more training on how to use inhalers.” At the same time, the facility can work with them to avoid or minimize interruptions that drag out the med pass and increase workloads for nurses.

continued on next page

5 Steps for a Successful Cost Containment Strategy Cont.

- 4. Work with the prescriber and pharmacy to minimize waste from unused medications.** This effort includes actions such as split billing at discharge, which bill medications people take home when they leave the facility to Medicare Part D or their private insurance . Elsewhere, if the resident is there for a short stay, it may be more cost-effective for the prescriber to prescribe just enough medications for that time, with the ability to refill if the individual stays longer. “Work with the prescriber and pharmacy to maximize efficiencies and reduce waste,” Creasy stressed, adding, “This includes communication about why the residents are in the facility, what medications they are taking and why, as well as when they are expected to be discharged.”
- 5. Increase efficiencies related to drug disposal.** It is estimated that more than \$2 billion a year in drugs are wasted in nursing homes each year. Instead of making nurses or others take the time to remove pills from blister packs or put them into disposal pouches, which is time-consuming and financially impractical, consider alternatives such as the use of medication drop boxes or mail-back solutions to save money. At the same time, Creasy suggested, “Know your state pharmacy regulations about how to handle drug disposal.”

Creasy noted, “If you identify opportunities for medication-related cost-containment, you can develop strategies, along with policies and procedures, to get everyone on board. It also will be important to have an organization-wide culture where team members are comfortable and confident enough to report inefficiencies, request additional training about med pass, or suggest ideas to contain costs while maximizing quality.”

When cost-containment efforts go hand in hand with personalized care that prioritizes comfort and quality outcomes, everyone reaps the rewards.