

Expanded Role for Physical Therapists Benefits Patients and Nurses

Over the past year, we have widened the scope of activities for our physical therapists (PTs), empowering them to remove certain types of surgical wound dressings and start more home care cases themselves. This optimizes care by enabling patients to begin physical therapy sooner after procedures like total joint replacement, while freeing up nurses to focus on more medically complex patients.

“As the pandemic eased up, we were looking for ways to ensure all of our clinical staff are operating to the fullest extent of their training and capabilities,” explains Joseph Gallagher, director, Operations Support Services. “By default, we’ve always sent our nurses to take care of anything wound-related – including removing Mepilex dressings, which are commonly used and very simple to take off. Once we realized this was something our PTs have the clinical expertise and license to do, we began training them in the procedure.”

Following the success of this approach, our Home Care team recently began training their PTs in the removal of Prevena wound care systems as well, which employ wound vacs to help drain the surgical wound after an orthopedic procedure. Because nursing care is no longer needed for these orthopedic surgery patients to begin physical therapy, our PTs are now opening many more home care cases themselves – enabling each patient’s rehab therapy to start sooner.

“By freeing up our nurses from doing orthopedic starts of care, this new protocol also allows the organization to accept more home care referrals overall,” adds Gallagher. “Plus, our PTs report feeling more attuned to the patient’s wound status, since they’re involved in the wound care process from the beginning.”

“Our intake team is now looking at every patient that’s referred to us to see if they’re eligible for a PT start of care,” says Angela Fallon, director of Strategic Account Development. “We’re also working closely with orthopedic practices to educate them about this new approach, and to let them know we can start their surgery patients on home-based physical therapy as soon as they’re discharged – so send them our way!”