

1.4 Problem Identification Using the RAI

Clinicians are generally taught a problem identification process as part of their professional education. For example, the nursing profession's problem identification model is called the nursing process, which consists of assessment, diagnosis, outcome identification, planning, implementation, and evaluation. All good problem identification models have similar steps to those of the nursing process.

The RAI simply provides a structured, standardized approach for applying a problem identification process in nursing homes. The RAI should not be, nor was it ever meant to be, an additional burden for nursing home staff.

The completion of the RAI can be conceptualized using the nursing process as follows:

- a. **Assessment**—Taking stock of all observations, information, and knowledge about a resident from all available sources (e.g., medical records, the resident, resident's family, and/or guardian or other legally authorized representative).
- b. **Decision Making**—Determining with the resident (resident's family and/or guardian or other legally authorized representative), the resident's physician and the interdisciplinary team, the severity, functional impact, and scope of a resident's clinical issues and needs. Decision making should be guided by a review of the assessment information, in-depth understanding of the resident's diagnoses and co-morbidities, and the careful consideration of the triggered areas in the CAA process. Understanding the causes and relationships between a resident's clinical issues and needs and discovering the “whats” and “whys” of the resident's clinical issues and needs; finding out who the resident is and consideration for incorporating their needs, interests, and lifestyle choices into the delivery of care, is key to this step of the process.
- c. **Identification of Outcomes**—Determining the expected outcomes forms the basis for evaluating resident-specific goals and interventions that are designed to help residents achieve those goals. This also assists the interdisciplinary team in determining who needs to be involved to support the expected resident outcomes. Outcomes identification reinforces individualized care tenets by promoting the resident's active participation in the process.
- d. **Care Planning**—Establishing a course of action with input from the resident (resident's family and/or guardian or other legally authorized representative), resident's physician and interdisciplinary team that moves a resident toward resident-specific goals utilizing individual resident strengths and interdisciplinary expertise; crafting the “how” of resident care.
- e. **Implementation**—Putting that course of action (specific interventions derived through interdisciplinary individualized care planning) into motion by staff knowledgeable about the resident's care goals and approaches; carrying out the “how” and “when” of resident care.
- f. **Evaluation**—Critically reviewing individualized care plan goals, interventions and implementation in terms of achieved resident outcomes as identified and assessing the need to modify the care plan (i.e., change interventions) to adjust to changes in the resident's status, goals, or improvement or decline.

The following pathway illustrates a problem identification process flowing from MDS (and other assessments), to the CAA decision-making process, care plan development, care plan implementation, and finally to evaluation. This manual will refer to this process throughout several chapter discussions.



If you look at the RAI process as a solution oriented and dynamic process, it becomes a richly practical means of helping nursing home staff gather and analyze information in order to improve a resident's quality of care and quality of life. The RAI offers a clear path toward using all members of the interdisciplinary team in a proactive process. There is absolutely no reason to insert the RAI process as an added task or view it as another "layer" of labor.

The key to successfully using the RAI process is to understand that its structure is designed to enhance resident care, increase a resident's active participation in care, and promote the quality of a resident's life. This occurs not only because it follows an interdisciplinary problem-solving model, but also because staff (across all shifts), residents and families (and/or guardian or other legally authorized representative) and physicians (or other authorized healthcare professionals as allowable under state law) are all involved in its "hands on" approach. The result is a process that flows smoothly and allows for good communication and tracking of resident care. In short, it works.

Since the RAI has been implemented, nursing home staff who have applied the RAI process in the manner we have discussed have discovered that it works in the following ways:

- **Residents Respond to Individualized Care.** While we will discuss other positive responses to the RAI below, there is none more persuasive or powerful than good resident outcomes both in terms of a resident's quality of care and enhanced quality of life. Nursing home providers have found that when residents actively participate in their care, and care plans reflect appropriate resident-specific approaches to care based on careful consideration of individual problems and causes, linked with input from residents, residents' families (and/or guardian or other legally authorized representative), and the interdisciplinary team, residents have experienced goal achievement and either their level of functioning has improved or has deteriorated at a slower rate. Nursing home staff report that, as individualized attention increases, resident satisfaction with quality of life also increases.
- **Staff Communication Has Become More Effective.** When staff members are involved in a resident's ongoing assessment and have input into the determination and development of a resident's care plan, the commitment to and the understanding of that care plan is enhanced. All levels of staff, including nursing assistants, have a stake in the process. Knowledge gained from careful examination of possible causes and solutions of resident problems (i.e., from performing the CAAs) challenges staff to hone the professional skills of their discipline as well as focus on the individuality of the resident and holistically consider how that individuality is accommodated in the care plan.

- **Resident and Family Involvement in Care Has Increased.** There has been a dramatic increase in the frequency and nature of resident and family involvement in the care planning process. Input has been provided on individual resident goals, needs, interests, strengths, problems, preferences, and lifestyle choices. When considering all of this information, staff members have a much better picture of the resident, and residents and families have a better understanding of the goals and processes of care.
- **Increased Clarity of Documentation.** When the approaches to achieving a specific goal are understood and distinct, the need for voluminous documentation diminishes. Likewise, when staff members are communicating effectively among themselves with respect to resident care, repetitive documentation is not necessary and contradictory notes do not occur. In addition, new staff, consultants, or others who review records have found that the increased clarity of the information documented about a resident makes tracking care and outcomes easier to accomplish.

The purpose of this manual is to offer clear guidance, through instruction and example, for the effective use of the RAI, and thereby help nursing home staff achieve the benefits listed above.

In keeping with objectives set forth in the Institute of Medicine (IOM) study completed in 1986 (Committee on Nursing Home Regulation, IOM) that made recommendations to improve the quality of care in nursing homes, the RAI provides each resident with a standardized, comprehensive and reproducible assessment. This tool assesses a resident's ability to perform daily life functions, identifies significant impairments in a resident's functional capacity, and provides opportunities for direct resident interview. In essence, with an accurate RAI completed periodically, caregivers have a genuine and consistent recorded "look" at the resident and can attend to that resident's needs with realistic goals in hand.

Furthermore, with the consistent application of item definitions, the RAI ensures standardized communication both within the nursing home and between facilities (e.g., other long-term care facilities or hospitals). Basically, when everyone is speaking the same language, the opportunity for misunderstanding or error is diminished considerably.