



Medicare

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Just the Facts Three Hour Therapy Guideline for Inpatient Rehabilitation

There isn't a hard and fast "3 hour therapy rule". The patient's need for 3 hours of therapy at least 5 days per week is only one way of demonstrating that someone meets the intensity level for inpatient rehabilitation. Simply rendering three hours of skilled therapy a week does not justify inpatient rehabilitation. The hours of therapy a patient receives must be medically necessary. On the other hand, there may be patients who do not receive three hours of daily therapy but are still appropriate because of their unique needs, such as a person who is too medically fragile to tolerate 3 hours of skilled therapy, but could not participate in rehabilitation at a lower level because of their medical comorbidities.

Although patients in inpatient rehabilitation typically receive PT and OT services, some patients may need other types of skilled services (e.g., speech therapy, therapeutic recreation, prosthetics & orthotics) in addition to, or in lieu of, some PT or OT services. The auxiliary services still need to be medically necessary and a reviewer would need to look at the total services rendered to determine if an inpatient level of care is appropriate. Therefore, under appropriate clinical circumstances, other therapeutic services besides PT and OT could be part of the therapy rendered to support the patient needed an intensive multi-disciplinary inpatient rehabilitation program. However, simply using other modalities to fill up the time to meet the so-called "3 hour rule" would not necessarily add anything to support the level of intensity needed to justify an inpatient stay.

