



HIGHER ACUITY MEANS HIGHER RISK

by: Cynthia Uptmore

Recent data strongly suggests the overall acuity level of residents and patients in long term care facilities is increasing significantly. Maintaining quality care and safety for those individuals with higher acuity is a major challenge facing the healthcare industry.

WHAT DOES HIGHER ACUITY MEAN TO YOUR FACILITY

When a residential care facility for the elderly or a skilled nursing facility accepts residents or patients whose needs or acuity levels exceed the staff's skills or training, the facility opens itself up to a greater risk of adverse outcomes and liability. Numerous factors have supported this trend toward higher acuity levels in long term care facilities. These factors include:

- Market changes;
- A growing philosophy that since an assisted living facility is a home to its residents, those residents should be allowed to "age in place" as long as possible rather than being relocated to a nursing home;
- An increase in moderate to severe cognitive impairment in the elderly population;
- A similar increase in serious/ complex chronic conditions;
- Advanced age

WHAT STEPS CAN BE TAKEN TO DECREASE THE HIGHER RISK ASSOCIATED WITH ACCEPTING HIGHER ACUITY RESIDENTS AND PATIENTS

- Review current admission criteria and ensure the criteria used is in compliance with applicable state and federal regulations;
- Create and faithfully utilize initial screening tools;
- Only admit residents and patients who meet established admission criteria;
- Identify a thorough plan to care for each new resident or patient;
- Identify potential high acuity resident and patients;
- Notify physician, family and legal representative of any concerns regarding the resident or patient;
- Reassess the resident or patient regularly;
- Document the who, what, when, where, why and how;
- Evaluate whether interventions are appropriate and change as necessary