

MONTANA SWING BED BULLETIN

Swing Bed Length of Stay

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Swing Bed Length of Stay

So, what is an appropriate length of stay for a Skilled Swing Bed patient?

And more importantly: How do you know if the patient stay is too long? How do you know if the patient stay is too short? How do you know if the patient stay is just right!

The answer to all those questions is “it depends”. So, let’s start with some background information and then see if we can answer the question.

Length of Stay Requirement

For patients with Medicare as their primary payor, there is no limit to swing bed days. *C-1600 \$485.645 Special Requirements for CAH Providers of Long-Term Care Services (“Swing-Beds”)*

However, the patient must meet skilled criteria to both be admitted and continue to receive skilled care. The criteria are outlined in the *Medicare Benefits Manual Chapter 8:30 - Skilled Nursing Facility Level of Care – General, and 30.2.2 - Principles for Determining Whether a Service is Skilled*. The Montana Flex November 2021 Swing Bed Bulletin also covered criteria.

Other payors of course, including Medicare Advantage plans, have their own criteria and typically approve a certain number of days at the time of admission.

And, as you know for Medicare patients there is a co-pay from day 21 – 100 (\$194.50 in 2022), and 100% of costs starting on day 101.



Average Length of Stay Benchmark

There is no publicly available data base that provides information on Swing Bed length of stay. However, information on length of stay from various sources, listed below, varies from 10 – 13 days. The average length of stay in a skilled nursing facility for skilled care, averages 20 – 38 days, which is obviously longer than the length of stay in Swing Bed.

Four State SWB Cohort: September - December 2021

- Kansas 10 Days
- Indiana 11 Days
- Illinois 11 Days
- Montana 12 Days

The Right Length of Stay

Determining the appropriate length of stay is very much dependent on the patient and their needs. In the following paragraphs are four key questions that may help to answer the question.

1. What is the post-discharge setting?

A patient that is being discharged to Long Term Care where there is 24-hour support, may be able to be discharged sooner than a patient who will be discharged home and must function independently or with minimal support.

2. Has the patient met their goals?

Goals for discharge must be established at the time of admission, or shortly thereafter. These should be as specific as possible and clearly state the goal(s) the patient must achieve before they can be discharged. Examples of discharge goals include: Complete a 14-day course of antibiotics; Walk independently with a front-wheel walker at least 100 feet; Measure blood sugar and administer the correct dose of insulin independently at least six times.

However, just because the patient has met their goals in the hospital, does not necessarily mean they will be able to function in the post-discharge setting. A home visit, for patients being discharged home, should be part of the evaluation process to determine if the patient can function safely in the home environment.

Don't forget that in certain circumstances, Medicare allows development of a maintenance program or additional time, if needed, to ensure that goals can be sustained. Medicare Benefits Manual 30.0, 30.4.1, 30.4.1.2 This is an important step in the discharge process. Just because the patient has met their goals in the hospital does not mean the goals can be sustained, or, that the patient can function safely at home.



The Right Length of Stay (Continued)

3. What is the post-discharge setting?

Sometimes, there can be recommendations or requests for discharge before the patient is ready. These situations can be tough, but it's very important that everyone agrees that the patient can in fact function safely after discharge. A trial period where the patient functions independently in the hospital (i.e., takes care of all their needs) and/or a short trial period at home can be one possible approach, especially if the patient or family is adamant about discharge.

4. Have all discharge arrangements been made and confirmed?

Ensuring that 100% of support needs are in place before the patient is discharged is critical. Has Home Health been confirmed with a specific time to see the patient? Has DME been confirmed and delivered prior to discharge? Have medication orders been written? Has the primary care physician or specialist been notified of the discharge and has an appointment been scheduled? If any of the discharge plans are uncertain or not confirmed, then it is better to wait a few days rather than discharge the patient without adequate support.

Although not specifically related to length of stay, a post-discharge phone call is recommended within 24 – 48 hours to ensure they are doing all right and if they have any questions.

5. What is your readmission rate?

Your readmission rate can tell you a lot about if your length of stay is appropriate. Take the time to analyze your readmissions and determine the reasons. Analyzing each readmission for the root cause can help develop strategies to reduce readmissions in the future.

6. How does your length of stay compare to other swing bed programs?

Although, as already mentioned, there is not a national data base, reviewing your length of stay in comparison to other swing bed programs can provide insight into if your length of stay is above or below the average. It is important to note however, that not all CAHs accept the same types of patients. If you are accepting more complex patients, then your length of stay will probably be longer than the average.



Test Your Knowledge

1. **A patient with Medicare insurance cannot stay in Swing Bed for more than 20 days.**
 - True
 - False
 - Maybe

2. **Patients may benefit from a home visit or trial period at home before they are discharged.**
 - True
 - False
 - Maybe

3. **If the patient has met their discharge goals they should be discharged as soon as possible.**
 - True
 - False
 - Maybe

4. **The readmission rate can help determine if the length of stay is appropriate.**
 - True
 - False
 - Maybe

Answers:

1. False 2. True 3. Maybe 4. True