

Functional Outcomes After Cancer Rehabilitation

Condition: “Functional outcome” is a term used to describe a patient’s ability to perform tasks of daily living. “Cancer rehabilitation” is the process cancer patients go through after cancer treatment to build strength and endurance, reduce pain and stress, and regain independence.

Background: It is essential to measure cancer patient’s functional outcomes, as it offers critical information about their prognosis and ability to tolerate toxic anticancer therapies. Clinicians can perform different tests to measure how well a patient is functioning after cancer treatment and during rehabilitation.

Risk Factors: Assessing functional outcomes does not impose a risk to the patient. However, clinicians should have a good understanding of the limitations of each test when interpreting the results.

History and Symptoms: Before testing, clinicians should identify possible functional limitations. Helpful information includes the patient’s cancer type, present symptoms (e.g., nausea, weight loss, fatigue, shortness of breath, fever, pain), and anticancer treatments received (e.g., chemotherapy, radiation, surgery). During testing, clinicians should consider patient’s perceived difficulty while performing tasks, as this may affect the test results. Common cancer related symptoms that can affect test results include fatigue and pain.

Physical Exam: Physical examination may be performed as a component of testing; this will vary depending on the type of test utilized. A complete physical exam can also help define therapy goals.

Diagnostic Process: While functional outcome testing does not include blood tests or imaging tests, it provides valuable information about the patient’s overall health and well-being.

Rehab Management: Physical medicine and rehabilitation (PM&R) physicians can improve a person’s function and quality of life after cancer. The use of functional outcome assessments helps identify specific challenges that patients experience. This information can then be used to focus rehabilitation therapies and optimize patient care.

Other Resources for Patients and Families: The [American Cancer Society](https://www.americancancer.org/) has a wide range of resources to help patients, as well as caregivers and families.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is PM&R?

Physical medicine and rehabilitation (PM&R), also known as physiatry, is a primary medical specialty that aims to enhance and restore functional ability and improve quality of life to those with injuries, physical impairments or disabilities affecting the brain, spinal cord, nerves, bones, joints, ligaments, muscles and tendons. PM&R physicians, known as physiatrists, evaluate and treat the whole body, maximize patients' independence in their daily life and are experts in designing comprehensive, patient-centered treatment plans to empower patients to achieve their goals. By taking the whole body into account, they can accurately pin-point problems, decrease pain, assist in recovery from devastating injuries and maximize overall outcomes and performance with non-surgical and peri-surgical options. To learn more, visit www.aapmr.org/aboutpmr.

What makes PM&R physicians unique?

PM&R physicians' training focuses not just on treating medical conditions, but on enhancing the patient's performance and quality of life in the context of those medical conditions. They focus not only on one part of the body, but instead on the development of a comprehensive program for putting the pieces of a person's life back together – medically, socially, emotionally and vocationally – after injury or disease. PM&R physicians make and manage medical diagnoses, design a treatment plan and prescribe the therapies that physical therapists or other allied therapists perform or that are carried out by the patients themselves. By providing an appropriate treatment plan, PM&R physicians help patients stay as active as possible at any age. Their broad medical expertise allows them to treat disabling conditions throughout a person's lifetime.

Why see a PM&R physician?

A PM&R physician will thoroughly assess your condition, needs, and expectations and rule out any serious medical illnesses to develop a treatment plan. By understanding your condition and goals, you and your PM&R physician can develop a treatment plan suited to your unique needs.

How do I find a PM&R physician near me?

Visit www.aapmr.org/findapmrphysician or contact your primary care physician for a referral.