

## **Standards of Practice**

***Sharon L. Reavis MS, RN, CRC, CCM***  
***Chair, Standards Committee, IALCP***

Standards of Practice represent the parameters of responsibility for which practitioners are accountable. Standards of Practice provide a framework for process and measurement for quality. For life care planning, Standards of Practice delineate a consistency of practice across disciplines and define the practice uniformly. Pursuant to the transdisciplinary nature of the practice of life care planning, the committee formed to draft the Standards of Practice faced the daunting task of examining a myriad of licensure and practice standards for multiple professions. The objective was to research existing laws and standards to avoid conflict and to maintain individual professional standards for the groups represented. Furthermore, the goal was to isolate and define the practice components that are uniquely representative of the specialty of life care planning. This then allowed a framework for appropriate professional judgement within the context of guidelines. Moreover, the intent was to frame standards that would encourage individual practitioners to participate in education and research directed toward the advancement and refinement of the practice, itself.

To meet this challenge, committee members were selected who possessed significant experience in their fields and in the development and implementation of professional practice standards.

These Standards of Practice are intended as a foundation for that which we do, and it is the hope of the authors that they will also serve as a foundation for excellence in the future. The Standards of Practice represent a challenge to each practitioner to expand and enhance their performance in this evolving specialty area.

---

**SHARON L. REAVIS', RN, MS, CRC, CCM** educational background includes a diploma in nursing from Riverside Hospital of Professional Nursing, a Bachelors degree in Health Care Administration from St. Joseph's College, a Masters of Science in Rehabilitation Counseling from Virginia Commonwealth University, and post graduate work in Rehabilitation counseling at Virginia Commonwealth University as well. Ms. Reavis holds certifications in the field of Rehabilitation Counseling, Case Management, as a National Certified Counselor, and is a Fellow of the International academy of Life Care Planners. She is licensed as a registered nurse and rehabilitation provider in the State of Virginia as well.

---

# Standards of Practice

Life care planning has evolved from a practice primarily within the field of litigation support to application in elder care, chronic illness, and discharge planning. The need for standards of practice has become more critical with this growth. As the professional transdisciplinary organization for life care planners, the International Academy of Life Care Planners has developed Standards of Practice. Committee Chair-woman Sharon Reavis, RN, MS, CRC, CCM, Karen Preston, PHN, MS, CRRN, and Roger Weed, PhD, CRC, CDMS, CCM, CLCP, worked more than two years to develop these standards, consistent with the diversity of practice settings and individual professional standards of practice. These standards will evolve as they are influenced by changes in the various professions of life care planners and by external forces, such as accrediting bodies and courts of law. The field reviewed standards, which apply to the current practice of life care planning in all settings, are presented here for the use of life care planners. Questions regarding Standards of Practice as published by the IALCP, may be directed to the national office, via email or telephone: 1-800-531-5146.

## Sections

- I. Introduction
- II. Philosophical Overview/Goals of Life Care Planning
- III. Role and Functions of Life Care Planning
- IV. Standards or Performance

### I. Introduction

- **Definition of Life Care Planning** – A life care plan is a dynamic document based upon published standards of practice, comprehensive assessment, data analysis, and research, which provides an organized, concise plan for current and future needs, with associated costs, for individuals who have experienced catastrophic injury or have chronic health care needs.
  - **Historical Perspective** – The development of a comprehensive plan of care has always been considered an integral part of the rehabilitation process. This type of plan has historically been utilized by multiple disciplines including the rehabilitation plan utilized by rehabilitation counselors, the nursing care plan utilized by nurses, and the medical treatment plan used by therapeutic disciplines. Pursuant to rapid growth in medical technology and an increased emphasis on the cost of care, including concepts of managed care, information regarding the specific cost of care has become an increasingly more important aspect of health care. This process of developing a comprehensive plan and delineating
-

costs has evolved over an extensive period and now is utilized by case managers, counselors, and other professionals in many sectors. This concept represents an acceptable and pragmatic approach to the delivery of services within myriad sectors of the health care. The concept of rehabilitation/life care plans has been utilized in a variety of health care and legal settings to provide information and documentation regarding the cost of services related to long-term care. These plans also are provided as a valuable tools for rehabilitation planning, geriatric services implementation, management of health care funds, discharge planning, educational planning, and long-term managed care, among other areas.

- **Transdisciplinary Perspective** – Life care planning is a transdisciplinary specialty of practice within a professional disciplines. Each discipline brings to the process of life care planning Professional Standards of Practice, which must be adhered to by the individual professional. Each professional works within specific standards of practice for their discipline to ensure accountability, provide direction, and mandate responsibility for the standards for which he or she is accountable. These include, but are not limited to, activities related to quality of care, qualifications, collaboration, law, ethics, advocacy, resource utilization, and research. Moreover, each individual practitioner is responsible for following the Standards of Practice for Life Care Planning. In addition, individual practitioners must examine their qualifications as applied to each individual case. Therefore, a thorough knowledge of the disability and long-term care considerations by virtue of education and experience is a necessary component of the practitioner's competency for each individual case.
  - **Education/Preparation/Certification** – The life care planner should maintain appropriate professional credentials, including:
    - Membership in good standing within a professional health care discipline or rehabilitation discipline
    - Current professional licensure or National Board Certification within a professional health care discipline
    - Completion of an accredited program in nursing or a baccalaureate or higher-level educational program in a professional health care or rehabilitation discipline
  - The professional discipline should provide sufficient education and training to ensure that the Life Care Planner has an understanding of human anatomy and physiology, pathologies, the health care system, the role and function of health care disciplines, and clinical practice guidelines (or standards or care). Examples of professional disciplines meeting this requirement include, but are not limited to, registered nurses, medical social workers, rehabilitation counselors, psychologists, physicians, and therapists in health-related disciplines.
    - Maintenance of specific continued education required to ensure the indi-
-

vidual practitioner's licensure or certification

- Knowledge of professional legal requirements, including the legal principles of consent and confidentiality

## **II. Philosophical Overview/Goals of Life Care Planning**

The Life Care Plan should be a working document that provides accurate and timely information which can be easily utilized by the client and interested parties. It should be a living document that can serve as a lifelong guide to assist in the delivery of health care services in a managed format.

The care plan should be a collaborative effort among the various parties and should reflect goals that are preventive and rehabilitative in nature. As a dynamic document, the Life Care Plan may require periodic updating to accommodate changes and should have quality outcomes as its goal.

### **Goals/Life Care Plans**

- To assist the client in achieving optimal outcomes by developing an appropriate plan of prevention and restoration. This may include recommendations for evaluations or treatment that may contribute to the client's level of wellness or provide information regarding treatment requirements.
- To provide health education to the client and interested parties, when appropriate.
- To develop accurate and timely cost information and specificity of service allocations that can be applied by the client and interested parties.
- To develop options for care that may be necessary for alternative situations
- To communicate the Life Care Plan and objectives to the client and interested parties
- To develop measurement tools which can be used to analyze outcomes
- To routinely develop comprehensive assessments of the projected goals of the Life Care Plan, whenever possible

## **III. Role and Functions of Life Care Planners**

- A. **Scope of Practice/Applications** – As a member of a professional health care discipline, the Life Care Planner must remain within the scope of practice for that discipline as determined by state or national organizations. The functions associated with performing Life Care Planning are within the scope of practice for health care professionals.

Analysis of data and evaluation of care recommendations are key elements in the functions of life care planning. In performing these tasks, the Life Care

---

Planner will communicate with a variety of health care professionals regarding a case and temporarily may assume a peripheral role in management of the case. The Life Care Planner must take care to keep the Life Care Planning function separate from caregiver and case manager functions. The Life Care Planner does not assume decision-making responsibility beyond the scope of his/her own professional discipline.

- B. **Specialty Skills** – The Life Care Planner must have skill and expertise in understanding the health care and rehabilitation needs addressed in a Life Care Plan. Personal clinical knowledge and practice experience provide an excellent foundation for development of a credible Life Care Plan. To enhance the quality of the Life Care Plan, the Life Care Planner must be able to locate appropriate resources when necessary. The Life Care Planner provides a consistent, objective, thorough methodology for constructing the Life Care Plan, while relying on appropriate medical information, resources, and personal expertise for developing the content of the Life Care Plan. The Life Care Planner relies on state-of-the-art knowledge and resources to develop a Life Care Plan. Specialized skills are required to successfully develop a Life Care Plan. These include, but are not limited to, the ability to critically analyze data, manage large volumes of information, attend to details, demonstrate clear and thorough written and verbal communication skills, develop positive relationships, create and use networks for gathering information, work autonomously, and demonstrate a professional demeanor and appearance.

C. **Functions**

- Data Collection
    - Collects data that are systematic, comprehensive, and accurate
    - Collects data about biopsychosocial, financial, educational, and vocational status and needs
  - Obtains information from medical records, client/family/significant others, and appropriate treating or consulting health care professionals
    - Assessments
    - Analyzes data to determine client needs and consistency of care recommendations with standards of care
    - Assesses need for further evaluations or expert opinions
  - Planning
    - Follows a consistent method for organizing data, creating a narrative life care plan report and cost projections
    - Develops and uses written documentation tools for reports and tables
    - Develops recommendations for content of the life care plan tables for each client and a method for validating inclusion or exclusion of content
    - Collaboration
-

- Develops positive relationships with all parties
  - Seeks expert opinions
  - Shares relevant information to aid in formulating recommendations and opinions
    - Plan development research. The research component of Life Care Planning requires a consistent, valid, and reliable approach to data collection.
    - Reviews current literature or other published sources to determine current standards of care and available care resources
    - Collaborates with other treating professionals regarding Standards of Care and recommendations for each client
    - Determines replacement frequency for appropriate items of care
    - Delineates options and costs for each aspect of care, using sources that are available in the client's geographic area
    - Considers appropriate criteria for care options
  - i. Maintains specific criteria for each aspect of care. Example: residential facility
    - Category (e.g., intermediate care facility/mental retardation)
    - Population served
    - Staff/client ratio
    - Staff credentials
    - Level of care
    - Cost information (per diem inclusions, etc..)
    - Descriptive data
      - Method of selecting care choices and cost data is valid and reliable (i.e., objective, uses comparisons, based on statistical evidence).
      - An appropriate number of sources is researched to determine available choices and costs.
  - When available, classification systems (e.g., ICD-9 codes, CPT) are used to correlate care recommendations
    - Care choices are made matching client characteristics with the ability of the service or product to meet client needs.
    - Care choices are based on current state-of-the-art products and services that are reasonably available.
    - Knowledge is maintained of care standards, services and products through continuing education, literature, exhibits, etc.
  - Facilitation
-

- Maintains objectivity and assists others in resolving disagreements about appropriate content for the Life Care Plan.
- Provides information about the Life Care Planning process to involved parties to elicit cooperative participation.
- Evaluation
- Reviews and revises the Life Care Plan for internal consistency and completeness.
- Reviews the Life Care Plan for consistency with standards of care and seeks resolution of inconsistencies.
- Provides follow-up consultation to ensure that the Life Care Plan is understood and properly interpreted.
- Testimony
  - Acts as a consultant to legal proceedings, related to determining care needs and costs.
  - Provides expert sworn testimony regarding development and content of the Life Care Plan.
  - Maintains up-to-date records about participation in sworn testimony.

#### **IV. Standards or Performance**

Ethics refers to a set of principles of “right” conduct, a theory or a system of moral values, or the rules or standards governing the conduct of a person or members of a profession. The primary goal of practice ethics is to protect clients, provide guidelines for practicing professionals, and to enhance the profession as a whole. Within the Life Care Planning industry all practitioners are members of one or more professional disciplines and/or are licensed or certified. It is expected that Life Care Planners follow appropriate relevant ethical guidelines within their areas of professional practice and expertise. Life Care Planners are expected to maintain appropriate confidentiality, avoid dual relationships, adequately advise clients of the role of the Life Care Planner, and maintain competency in the profession.

- **Confidentiality:** Appropriate confidentiality is a sensitive and important concept. Some professionals will have communications protected by “privilege” which is statutorily based in each state. For example, although no “Life Care Planners” are currently covered by privilege, many may be professional counselors, licensed psychologists or others who have the additional statutory protection. In addition, litigation has the additional component of attorney work product that may have an effect on what information may be disclosed. The Life Care Planner must be thoroughly informed on this topic.
  - **Dual relationships:** A personal relationship with a client is not appropriate during the course of service. Developing Life Care Plans for friends, co-workers,
-

---

professional colleagues, or anyone where the objectivity and professionalism of the care plan is questions should be avoided.

- **Client advisement of role:** Each client should be fully informed about the role of the Life Care Planner. For example, the client should be fully informed about who is requesting the Life Care Plan as well as the confidentiality of communications. Also, Life Care Planners who have dual role responsibilities should clarify that they are not acting as a case manager, psychologist, etc. and what the limits of their participation might be.
  - **Competency:** The Life Care Planner is expected to accurately represent any information received for a particular case. Medical recommendations are to have an appropriate medical foundation. Research information that the Life Care Planner has obtained for all aspects of care should be readily available for examination by appropriate reviewers.
  - **Research** – The Life Care Plan will have as its basis the Scientific Principles of medicine and health care. The involvement of the Life Care Planner in the area of research should include, but not limited to, the following objectives:
    - The Life Care Planner will strive to identify and participate in research independently or in collaboration with others, utilizing research tools and activities that will promote quality outcomes.
    - The Life Care Planner will critique literature for application to life care planning.
    - The Life Care Planner will use appropriate research findings in the development of Life Care Plans.
-