



# Social Determinants of Health:

## LEVERAGING OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY TO ASSIST IN REDUCING HEALTH DISPARITIES

By: Laurie Kolosky, RPT  
*Director of Programs and Education  
Site Coordinator of Clinical Education*

Professionals in the skilled nursing arena are familiar with the Minimum Data Set or MDS. The MDS is a standardized assessment tool used to gather information about residents' health status and needs. In 2023, we will see the MDS's revision include adding new social determinants of health (SDOH) to specifically have questions around ethnicity, race, language, transportation, health literacy, and social isolation.

These new SDOH will aid healthcare providers by affording a more comprehensive picture of factors that can impact a resident's health and well-being. The answers to these questions help identify areas where interventions may be necessary to address health disparities and improve patient outcomes.



### Social Determinants of Health (SDOH)





Studies suggest that SDOH accounts for between 30-55% of health outcomes and that SDOH is more important than health care or lifestyle choices in influencing health. Patients discharged from Skilled Nursing Facilities (SNFs) are at risk for higher social determinants of health (SDOH) disparities, such as:

- limited caregiver support
- transportation
- housing insecurity
- food access



## These SDOH risks can significantly increase a Skilled Nursing Facility patient’s potential for hospital readmissions.

An essential solution regarding SDOH is to assess and address SNF patients’ social needs. Proper attention paid to these new SDOHs will be a crucial strategy to reduce 30-day post-SNF readmissions, improve health outcomes, and positively impact healthcare costs and a patient’s financial liabilities.

One specific discipline that plays a critical role in assessing and addressing SDOH is that of the Occupational Therapist. April is National Occupational Therapy Month, with the theme for 2023 being “Bringing Possibilities to Life.” A comprehensive, thorough assessment of SDOH, strategic treatment interventions, and discharge planning, an Occupational Therapist can bring those possibilities to life for each patient, thereby reducing health inequalities.



## Occupational Therapists are one member of the Interdisciplinary Team that provides solutions to SDOH through:

- Documentation of race and ethnicity, including cultural preferences surrounding food, gender-related caregiver preferences, and religious choices
- Utilization of primary language preference: this may include interpreter services and patient education in the primary language.
- Education, in conjunction with Social Services, on available transportation resources within the patient's community to allow access to medical appointments, grocery shopping, and banking services.
- Treatment interventions aim to understand patients' medical diagnoses and necessary care.
- Addressing social isolation through the patient's engagement within the SNF community and ensuring appropriate support services are present as the patient transitions back home.

All members of the IDT must embrace the new additions to the MDS with the revisions in SDOH. A united approach is needed to address social determinants, which will only enhance our care provision for the elderly population to improve their quality of life and functional outcomes.



To learn more about the Preferred Therapy Solutions and how our Occupational Therapy Programs can assist your facility in reducing health disparities, contact Jim MacManus, Director of Business Development, at [jmacmanus@preftherapy.com](mailto:jmacmanus@preftherapy.com). #itsallaboutthepatient.

### **ABOUT PREFERRED THERAPY SOLUTIONS**

*Preferred Therapy Solutions is a full-service rehabilitation management organization dedicated to providing state-of-the-art clinical, management, billing, and information technology solutions to the post-acute and long-term care industry. Preferred Therapy Solutions is able to assist in developing a strategic road map designed to increase SNFs market share by identifying potential referral targets and providing useful information on competitor's performance. Preferred Therapy Solutions abilities significantly enhance the quality, productivity, scope, and efficiency of any facility's rehabilitation department while maintaining a focus on achieving high levels of patient satisfaction and providing excellent customer service.*

