Documenting the Child Outcomes Summary Rating

Session 7 Presentation Transcript

After reviewing earlier sessions, you now know how to reach a quality Child Outcomes Summary rating decision. In this session, we describe the evidence needed to document your rating. We discuss what we mean by documentation, why it is important, what it looks like, and questions you can ask to examine the quality of your own Child Outcomes Summary documentation.

What is Child Outcomes Summary (COS) documentation?

The Child Outcomes Summary rating is a number that represents a summary snapshot of the child's functioning in an outcome area. Documentation describes which features of the child's functioning led the team to the rating; it is the evidence for the rating. Documentation usually takes the form of a series of written bulleted items or a brief narrative paragraph.

Why is it important to document the child's functioning?

Documentation is important because it serves as a way to verify the accuracy of the Child Outcomes Summary rating. It shows whether teams are applying the rating criteria appropriately. Documentation stands as a record of the team's decision-making, showing the evidence and rationale for the selected rating.

Documentation as a Historical Record

Documentation can be used by current, as well as future or new, team members. A speech therapist, for example, could review the information if she could not be present at the meeting, or a new provider who joins the team could review the documentation to learn about the aspects of the child's functioning that led to the rating decision. An administrator also could use this summary of the evidence to review how teams are reaching their decisions.

How Documentation Is Used to Improve the Quality of COS Ratings

States and local programs should be looking at documentation on a regular basis to identify whether evidence is consistent with appropriate application of the Child Outcomes Summary rating criteria. Good

documentation enables an independent reviewer to confirm that the rationale for the rating and the evidence reflect appropriate application of the rating criteria. If review of documentation shows errors in how teams are implementing the Child Outcomes Summary process, then the information can be used to plan additional training and technical assistance.

Effective Documentation

Now, let's discuss the features of effective Child Outcomes Summary documentation and look at some examples.

Programs vary in how the information is written and where the documentation goes. That is, some programs use bulleted lists while others write short paragraphs. Some programs provide information in a table or a section of a paper form while others enter information directly into an electronic record.

Regardless of where and how the information appears, effective documentation will enable someone who was not present at the COS team meeting to understand the team's rationale for the rating and the key evidence considered that led to its decision.

Features of Effective Documentation

Let's discuss the key features of effective documentation.

It is important that key skills are described with enough specificity for a reader to picture how the child uses her skills in everyday situations and to understand how consistently the child uses those skills.

Documentation should also include a description of the presence and absence of age-anchored skills at the levels that are important to the rationale for the rating. Remember, the critical distinctions across the rating criteria are the mix of skills the child has that are age expected (AE), immediate foundational (IF), and foundational (F). The documentation needs to reflect the mix of skills in the rating selected, as applicable. For example, documentation for a rating of either 3 or 5 will provide evidence for different mixes of skills, whereas the documentation for a rating of 7 will note that the child's skills are all age expected.

Documentation, like the Child Outcomes Summary rating, should focus on the child's current level of functioning rather than how much progress a child has made in an outcome area.

Finally, documentation should name the assessment tool or tools that contributed information for the rating.

Connecting Documentation to Rating Criteria

The evidence recorded in documentation will differ depending on the rating that was assigned and provides the rationale for the selected rating. The documentation must be consistent with the Child Outcomes Summary rating criteria. When using the decision tree, note that the questions underscore the critical distinctions between points on the rating scale.

Evidence needs to match the criteria for the rating

For example, if the rating on an outcome is a 3, the evidence in the documentation needs to be consistent with the criteria for a 3. Evidence showing the child has mostly immediate foundational skills in the outcome area will indicate that the rating should not be a 2. In addition, the documentation should include a statement that the child is not yet using any age-expected skills. This confirms that the rating is not a 4 or higher.

Here is another example. If the rating for an outcome is a 5, the documentation should provide evidence of a mix of age-expected and not age-expected skills. The evidence should make it clear that the child displays more age-expected than non-age-expected skills. This will distinguish the rating from a 4. The evidence of non-age-expected skills also distinguishes the rating from a 6 or a 7.

Example 1: Weak Documentation

Leona, 43 Months, Outcome 2

Next, let's take a look at some examples of documentation.

Here is an example of weak documentation. Take a moment to review the features of effective documentation and consider why this documentation is weak.

In this example, the team simply recorded Leona's assessment scores instead of providing any information about specific skills. It is good that the team included information from an assessment tool, but the evidence does not address the other features of effective documentation.

Example 2: Weak Documentation

Charles, 58 Months, Outcome 3

Here is another example of weak documentation. Which features of effective documentation are missing from this example?

In this example, the team simply wrote a note saying to look at the child's full Early Intervention Record for evidence. Referring others to the child's record gives no indication of why the rating was selected.

Example 3: Weak Documentation

Jamie, 23 Months, Outcome 2

Here is another example of weak documentation. What is missing from this documentation that makes it weak?

Although this team does provide some information about the kinds of skills that were considered and some information about the age-anchoring of those skills, there is not enough detail on either of those points. In addition, this documentation does not describe the child's functioning across multiple aspects of the outcome area.

Example 4: Strong Documentation

Jamie, 23 Months, Outcome 2

Now take a moment to read an example of strong documentation presented in bullet format.

You can see that a few skills are listed with enough specificity to age-anchor them. The team also includes brief information about how commonly these skills are observed.

This documentation supports a rating of 4. It shows that the team found some age-expected functioning, but the mix is such that most of the child's skills are immediate foundational or foundational. There are specific enough examples that an external reviewer can confirm the rating.

As noted earlier, effective documentation can be written as a brief paragraph instead of with bullets. Here's the same documentation for Jamie in paragraph format.

Documentation Takes Practice

Documenting evidence for the team's rating decision is an essential part of a high-quality Child Outcomes Summary process. Writing good documentation takes practice. In the Just for Me activity for this session, you will have the opportunity to develop documentation for Kim, the child you met in Session 5. We encourage you to complete the activity and reflect on how you can incorporate key features of effective documentation into your practice.