

## Incorporating Social Determinants into Spine Care

By: [Cordata](#)

Increasingly, doctors and medical centers are acknowledging that a person's health isn't only determined by things like diet, exercise, or genetics — there are also several external social and environmental factors that contribute toward overall health, otherwise known as social determinants of health (SDOH).



These factors can add up quickly and have significant effects on someone's general health, as well as their ability to recover after treatment or surgery.

By incorporating SDOH into spine patient care, you not only create better outcomes for the patient, but you also create benefits for your program such as reduced readmission rates and cost savings.

Additionally, simply by gathering this social risk information from patients as part of common history-gathering, you alert patients that they are receiving care in a spine program that clearly cares more about them as people, as opposed to account numbers.

### Effects on Patient Outcomes

It is well evidenced that SDOH can affect a spine patient's outcomes. For instance, [one study](#) showed that employment status plays an essential role in determining someone's health. Unemployed individuals were found to be more likely to have a longer length of hospital stay and a nearly twofold greater rate of 30-day readmission than those who were employed at the time of back surgery.

Other studies have found that SDOH such as educational attainment and socioeconomic status have [significant relationships](#) to patients with chronic low back pain, and that SDOH are associated with an [increased risk](#) of developing postoperative complications following lumbar spine fusion.

By factoring SDOH into treatment, you can create more tailored patient care plans and increase the likelihood of successful patient outcomes by finding solutions to help patients recover given their circumstances.

## Cost Savings for Hospitals & Spine Programs

Patient readmissions can be costly for hospitals and spine centers. However, incorporating SDOH into treatment can help reduce unplanned readmission rates, as we know that certain social determinants have a significant relationship with whether patients are readmitted.

For instance, [one study](#) found that black patients and patients with no insurance or non-private insurance such as Medicare and Medicaid had higher odds of 30-day readmission, with comparable effects at 90 days.

When care plans are developed with the whole patient in mind and these social determinants are actively involved in the creation of personalized treatment, readmission rates can be reduced, leading to significant savings for treatment providers.

## How to Incorporate SDOH into Spine Patient Care

With limited funding, healthcare leaders are often faced with difficult choices of what they can and can't implement. As new approaches and innovative processes arise, budgets must be shifted to accommodate those that a hospital or spine center wishes to adopt. Justifying that adoption of new processes requires proof of a return on investment.

As many studies have shown, incorporating SDOH into spine patient care can reduce readmission rates, which can translate into hundreds of thousands of dollars saved.

Tools such as this ROI calculator for addressing social determinants of health can be extremely useful for demonstrating, in very clear terms, the exact financial benefit your hospital or program can expect from adopting new technology or processes.

## What Tools Do You Need to Incorporate SDOH in Your Patient Care?

So how exactly do hospitals or programs start incorporating SDOH into their treatment? One way to ensure that SDOH are given the attention they need is to implement a tool that very clearly and explicitly incorporates them into patient care plans.



The screenshot shows a patient record for Steven Roger Murdoch, born 04/01/1950 (71 years, Male). The interface includes a 'Team' button, a 'Priority Note' button, and a list of social determinants: Current smoker, Normal weight, Patient Acuity - Routine, Pain - 9, SDOH - Transportation, and SDOH - Veteran Status. A red alert icon indicates a complaint: 'He complains of bilateral buttock pain that radiates through his thighs and calves. Failed straight leg test. MRI - sagittal T2 MRI (left) and axial image at L4-L5 (right) demonstrates severe lumbar spinal stenosis secondary to facet arthropathy.'

For instance, [Cordata's Specialty Care Coordination Platform](#) puts social determinants at the forefront of every interaction with a patient's care plan. By placing these social determinants clearly on a patient's electronic record, you can keep these factors top of mind as nurse navigators or other members of your team determine the best next steps for their care.

It's critical to make sure you're collecting this information from the very first interaction with a patient. [Cordata Spine](#) does this through a questionnaire that all patients are given during intake. This way, medical staff can immediately identify social determinants of a new patient and tailor their care plans accordingly from the beginning to increase the likelihood of success and recovery. The SDOH social risks

are highly visible on every patient record, so that the risks can be considered in every pivotal conversation or change in care.

It's also helpful to have reporting features that can aggregate social determinants to get a high-level view and glean insights from the factors affecting your patient population. For instance, by easily looking at Cordata's Patient Status report, program leaders can visualize the social risks across their program population and determine whether they need to take actions like hiring interpreters, partnering with veteran affairs or transportation services, or other measures to better serve their patients.

## **Conclusion**

It has become increasingly clear that we need to look at the whole picture when it comes to providing the best care for spine patients. There is significant evidence that factoring social determinants of health in when devising care plans can not only provide better health outcomes for patients, but also reduce costly readmissions for hospitals and spine centers.

Learn more in the [full guide on Incorporating Social Determinants into Spine Care](#).

Cordata is Spine centers' #1 streamlined care navigation platform to understand the whole patient. For more information, contact Cam Teems at [Cam.Teems@CordataHealth.com](mailto:Cam.Teems@CordataHealth.com).