

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO!

Steps Toward Better Care



**Quality Improvement
Organizations**

Sharing Knowledge. Improving Health Care.
CENTERS FOR MEDICARE & MEDICAID SERVICES



Goals for Today

- What can you do now to manage your own healthcare—before you become a patient in the hospital?
- Let's learn more about how to navigate your way through the healthcare system—before, during, and after you leave the hospital.
- Our goal: Learn the steps for a safe care transition.



Plan Ahead

- Talk to your family, friends, neighbors, or members of your faith community about who is able to help you if you become ill.
- Talk to your doctor and your family about your health goals and about your advanced care directives.

and...



Plan Ahead, continued

- Make sure you carry a complete list of your current medications
- Carry a copy of your personal health record—and have a copy in a visible place in your home in case of an emergency.



Older Adults and Hospitals

- 20% of people who are 65+ will be hospitalized within a 12-month period.
- 70% will be admitted through the emergency room for an unplanned visit.
- 1 in 5 seniors will be readmitted to the hospital within 30 days of discharge.
- The second visit may be longer and more complex.



Healing Care

- Hospital stays are much shorter now: 2 - 3 days is common.
- Discharge is most likely to happen when you are not completely ready.
- Most of your healing care may take place at home.
- There are some things that you can do to ensure that you don't wind up back in the hospital.



Bring an Advocate

- Having a family member or friend to help you when you are in the hospital is important.
- It's a busy place with shift changes and different people providing care—you need your advocate to provide continuity and to make sure your concerns are addressed.
- It's complicated! You will need assistance in managing your care.



Tips for Discharge

- Two heads are better than one! On the day of discharge, be sure to have your advocate with you to listen to the discharge instructions.
- Ask questions about the warning signs of a worsening condition.
- Ask your advocate to make notes to help you remember later.



Concerned About How You'll Manage at Home?

- It's important to **speak up** about your concerns *before* discharge.



Address Your Concerns

If you are weak and worried about getting around,
ask for a physical therapy evaluation

If you are concerned about dressing, bathing, and cooking,
ask for an occupational therapy evaluation

If you are worried about finances, housing, utilities, food, in-home care or the cost of your meds,
ask to speak to the social worker

If you have questions about your condition, treatments you may need to do at home, or your medicine,
speak to your doctor, your nurse or both.



Overview of Four Key Steps

For a successful hospital stay...and a successful discharge:

1. Manage your medications.
2. Know your warning signs of a worsening condition.
3. Make & keep all follow-up appointments with your doctor.
4. Keep your own written personal health record.



Step 1: Manage Your Medications

- You may already be managing many meds.
- A stay in the hospital can change what meds you take and how you take them.
- Tell the hospital staff what medicines you currently take.
- Always keep an updated list of your medications in your wallet or purse, including over-the-counter meds, vitamins, and herbs.



Know Your Medications

- Before you leave the hospital, get a current list of your meds, the dose, and how to take them.
- Learn about the side effects of each.
- Ask about ALL medicine—those before the hospital and the new ones added in the hospital.
- Have a plan to keep your medicine organized.



Organize Your Medications

- Set your medications up once a week in a divided pill box
 - Helps you to keep track of each day's meds
 - Helps you take them at the right time of day
- If you have trouble organizing your meds, pharmacies will set up your meds and deliver them (for a fee)
- Using only one pharmacy makes it easier for the pharmacist to check for negative interactions between meds



Ask Questions

- Be sure to ask questions like:
 - What are they for?
 - How should I take them?
 - When and how often should I take them?
 - Will I need to continue taking them once I feel better?
- **ALWAYS ASK.** You need to know. You will stay healthier and safer when you get all of your questions answered before you go home.



Getting Your New Medications

- When leaving the hospital, have a plan for getting your new or changed medications. Don't miss a dose.
- If you use a mail-order pharmacy, tell the nurse and social worker so they can:
 - Get your medicine orders faxed to the mail-order pharmacy.
 - Arrange for a “short fill” of new and changed meds to tide you over until you get your order in the mail.
- Some pharmacies are closed at night or on Sundays. Work with the hospital staff to make sure you don't miss doses.
- After discharge, arrange to go to the pharmacy right away for your meds.
- If you can't afford your medicine, talk to the social worker well before discharge.



Step 2: Know Your Warning Signs

- These are also called “red flags”—a sign that tells you that your condition is getting worse.
- Before you leave the hospital, **ASK** what you should watch for and then :
 - Write it down. Ask your advocate to help you.
 - Don’t leave the hospital without the list of warning signs.



ACT on the Warning Signs

- Call your doctor right away when you think you see a “red flag” or warning sign of a worsening condition.
- An important rule of thumb: Contact the doctor who is managing that condition.
- Ask for help—if you can’t contact your doctor, ask your family or friends to do it for you.
- Know who to call after hours and on the weekends—the doctor, the walk-in clinic or 911.
- YOU know your body—take action and do not wait until you are sick to seek help.



Step 3: Make & Keep All Follow-up Appointments

- Your doctor may not know you were in the hospital. Don't assume that your doctor has been informed about your condition.
- It's really important that you see your doctor no later than 1 week after discharge.
- Write questions down as you think of them so you are ready for your appointment.



Calling Your Doctor

- You need to see your doctor no later than **one** week after you leave the hospital—maybe even sooner.
- When you call, tell the staff that you just got out of the hospital and **need** to see your doctor.
- If they tell you there are no openings, ask to speak to the nurse.
- **Be assertive**—don't take no for an answer.
- When you go into the office, bring your discharge instructions with you.
- Bring your written questions and a list of all of the meds you are taking (including vitamins, herbs, and over-the-counter medicines)
- Consider bringing your advocate into the exam room with you to listen and take notes.



Speaking Up

- The doctor's office is a busy place.
- Some magic words to use when you call:
 - I was just in the hospital.
 - I have a new medical condition.
 - I have questions about my new medicines.
 - My doctor will need to do follow-up on some tests.



Make Your Plans in Advance

- Once you set the doctor's appointment, make a reliable plan you can count on to get you there.
- Ask your family, a neighbor, a friend, or a member of your faith community to bring you to the doctor.
- Call your "helper" the day before with a reminder of your appointment.
- If you are eligible for Medicaid and need a ride, call:
Insert your numbers, etc.



Ask About Warning Signs

During your appointment:

- Ask your doctor how to handle each warning sign. You or your advocate should write it down.
- Ask your doctor what warning signs need urgent attention.



Possible Steps for Warning Signs

Depending on the severity of the warning sign, your doctor might advise you to take any of the following steps:

- Call your doctor, or speak to the on-call doctor during after-hours, on weekends or holidays.
- Call your doctor's nurse.
- Get an appointment that day.
- Go to the Emergency Department.
- *Not sure?* Call the doctor or call 911.



Step 4: Your Personal Health Record

- Your goals for your health care—including your advanced care directives
- Illnesses, problems, past hospital visits
- Lab work, tests
- Current medications you are taking
- Food, drug allergies and bad reactions to any medicines
- Immunizations, oral health care, eye exams, physicals



It's Your Job

- **When it comes to your body, you are the expert.**
- Doctors' offices and hospitals may not pass on your health information to each other in a complete or timely manner.
- If you hear misinformation about your condition or care, it's important to **speak up**. Make sure they know the whole story.
- Remember—**You** are the most accurate source of health information about yourself.



Not Ready to Go Home?

If you have Medicare coverage:

- The hospital is required to give you advance, written notice of your discharge date
- If you do not feel you are ready to leave, you can ask for a 2nd opinion. But act quickly!
 - For hospital stays in Idaho or Washington, call 1-877-290-4346 to request a discharge appeal.
 - More information is available at www.QualisHealthMedicare.org/appeals



Transfer to a Nursing Home?

- Unless you have been **admitted** to the hospital for **three** days, Medicare may not pay for nursing home care.
- Your hospital care may not be considered an “admission.” **Ask** your doctor or hospital social worker:
 - “Have I been admitted to the hospital or am I under observation?”
 - Have I been admitted for three or more days?



Need Help at Home?

- **Before** you leave the hospital, talk to the social worker about resources for home.
- Medicare will pay for home health care if you:
 - Are homebound
 - Need skilled care, such as nursing, physical therapy, speech therapy or occupational therapy
 - Have a doctor's order



When You Leave the Hospital

- Be sure you have all the information you need.
- Know how to take your medications.
- Know your warning signs of a worsening condition.
- Remember that you won't be able to do all of the same things you did before you became ill.
- Even if it's hard to ask for **help**, do it. Ask for help.



Practice Home Safety

- Make changes in your home.
- Identify places where you might need extra help— like the bathroom or kitchen.
- Beware of tripping and slipping hazards.
- Arrange for help at home.



You May Need a Helping Hand...

There are many community agencies ready to help you and your caregiver:

- **Insert organization name and phone number; list services available**



Helpful Tips

- Have a plan and be prepared.
- Begin your personal health record today.
- Make sure your medication list is updated and always keep it in your wallet or purse.
- Talk to your family and friends about who can be your advocate to help you when you become ill.
- You'll need to speak up. Remember you're the expert about your own body.



Pack Your “Going to the Hospital Bag”

Include these items:

- Your current medication list
- Your written health record
- Phone numbers of family and friends
- Warm socks!



Once Again: The Four Key Steps

For a successful hospital stay...and a successful discharge:

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Credits

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For more information about Qualis Health's care transitions work:

www.QualisHealthMedicare.org/Transitions

For more information about Medicare and taking an active role in your healthcare:

www.QualisHealthMedicare.org/people-with-medicare

