

Tips for hospital patients

- Actively participate in your health care
- Keep a written log of your medical history, including chronic illnesses, surgeries, and current medications or therapy. Keep this information current and readily available in case you or your advocate should need it.
- Have an advocate who is aware of what treatment, including medications, has been ordered, and can ask questions on your behalf. If possible, give your advocate a copy of your medical history information or inform them of where it is kept.
- If a hospitalization is scheduled in advance, have a prepared list of questions. Ask the physician for as much information as possible regarding the expected treatment, therapy, tests, length of stay, activity (bedrest or ambulatory), pain control method, medications such as antibiotics, intravenous fluids, and diet.
- If a hospitalization is unscheduled, you or your designated advocate should prepare a written list of questions as soon as possible.
- You may be attended by a physician other than your primary care physician while in the hospital. Some health care plans are using physician specialists called hospitalists. It is important that you or your family does not assume a hospitalist knows everything about your medical history, including the medications being taken at home. Make a list of prescription and over the counter medications including the dosage and take it to the hospital. **DO NOT TAKE THE MEDICATIONS TO THE HOSPITAL.** Alert physicians and nursing staff to all allergies.
- If surgery is scheduled, you should expect a visit from the anesthesiologist or nurse anesthetist prior to going to the operating room. Inform this person of all medical history, including chronic conditions, prior surgeries or

anesthesia. Do not assume he/she already knows. Do not become annoyed if the same questions are asked several times by different caregivers. Asking these questions helps assure your safety. Inform the anesthesiologist or nurse anesthetist of any allergies.

- If you do not understand what the physician or nursing staff is saying, ask for clarification.
- Personal care and the way it is given has changed in hospitals. Daily bedbaths, linen changes and backrubs are not necessarily routine any more. Ask nursing staff what to expect re: personal care. Nursing policies and procedures establish the standards of care expected.
- Hospitals may have a booklet with helpful information. If contacted by the hospital prior to a scheduled procedure, be receptive. Use this as an opportunity to obtain information on what to expect.
- Hospitals apply identification bands to patients upon admission. Verify that the information on this band is correct. Very often, more than one patient on a nursing unit has the same last name, occasionally even the same first name and/or the same physician. Do NOT remove this band while in the hospital. This band assures correct identification of you by the hospital staff.
- Ask questions. If you believe a medication, treatment, diagnostic test, diet is an error, ask the staff to verify the correct medication, etc. is being given to the correct patient.
- Patients must have discharge instructions. If you are not clear on what to do after discharge, ask your physician or the nursing staff. This includes prescriptions you need, how to care for dressings or incisions, activities, diet, when to see a physician, what problems might occur, such as fever, drainage, etc.
- Hospitals are required to have written patient rights which should be given to you. These rights

include a grievance procedure. Most problems can be immediately resolved if brought to the attention of hospital staff. If you do not believe the issue has been adequately addressed, ask to whom you can speak. Many hospitals have patient advocates. Even after business hours, a house supervisor or administrator is designated as responsible for the hospital.

- No health care provider wants to harm a patient or make a mistake. Ask questions. Answer their questions as accurately and completely as you can. Help them to help you.