

Before leaving the hospital...

Q: What do I need to know when leaving a hospital?

A: The federal government has prepared a “Discharge Planning Checklist” to help patients and families ask the right questions when they’re leaving a hospital or a nursing home.

One national Medicare study found that nearly one in five hospital admissions resulted in readmissions within 30 days of discharge. People who are readmitted to the hospital tend to be older and have multiple chronic illnesses. High readmission rates for people with chronic illness may be due to such factors as an inadequate information by hospital discharge planners to patients, caregivers, and post-hospital providers; poor patient compliance with their care plan; insufficient reliance on family caregivers; the worsening of a patient’s clinical condition; and medical errors.

It’s important to know what kind of medical and support care you are going to need when you return home. You and your caregivers should be treated as part of the discharge planning team. Keep asking questions until you get answers that make sense to you.

The “Discharge Checklist” is divided into 4 sections:

1) What’s Ahead?

- Where will I get care after discharge? Do I have options? (Be sure to tell the staff what you prefer).
- What family member or friend will be helping me after discharge? (Write down their name and phone number.)

2) My Condition

- What is my health condition, and what can I do to help myself get better?
- Write down a list of all your prescriptions, over-the-counter drugs, and vitamins. Tell the hospital staff what drugs you took before you were admitted. Ask what each drug is for.

3) Recovery & Support

- Will I need medical equipment? Who will arrange for this?
- Will I need help with bathing, dressing, using the toilet, climbing stairs, cooking, grocery shopping, house cleaning, paying bills, getting to the doctor, picking up prescriptions?
- What other tasks will require special skills, like changing a bandage or giving a shot? Can I be trained to do this?
- Is there a counselor or support group in my area for people who are coping with my illness?
- What help can I get in paying for care I need? Who can I talk to about what my insurance will cover, and how much I will have to pay?
- Can I get written discharge instructions and a summary of my health status?
- Can you write down any appointments or tests I need in the next few weeks?

4) For the Caregiver

- What questions do you have about items on this checklist? What items on this list can you help me with?
- Can you get my prescriptions or special diet needs early so we don’t have to make extra trips after discharge?

If you feel you are being rushed out of the hospital too soon, ask the staff

for your “notice of non coverage,” and once you have that, call 1-800-252-5533 to make an appeal with the MassPRO.

