

Resources for Families
After a Hospital Stay



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Discharge From Hospital

Hospital stays of any length are usually unpleasant and unwelcome. They are often connected with painful and traumatic experiences. Most people look forward to being discharged and returning to the comforts of home. When recovering from illness, injury, or surgery, additional supports may be needed. Preparing for a senior's discharge from hospital can be complicated.

When the time for discharge is approaching, it's vital to request a discharge planning conference so that you can discuss the needs of the patient, the resources available, and who will coordinate or provide services. With this knowledge, you will be able to make informed decisions about arranging additional private care if necessary.

Connecting with a social worker at the hospital is important for a successful discharge. They are your in-hospital advocates. Have discussions with doctors and nurses ahead of time and figure out exactly when they think the patient will leave the hospital. You can also get the assistance of a Care Expert from Qualicare. They can advocate for you, facilitate the process, and reduce the risk of hospital readmissions by ensuring that care is extended after discharge.

Verify all Prescriptions

A study of almost 400,000 hospital patients showed that there is a significant risk of patients inadvertently discontinuing vital prescription medications after discharge.*

This study tracked elderly patients who were on at least 1 of 5 medications for chronic conditions (statins, thyroid medications, anti-coagulants, inhalers for respiratory diseases, and gastric acid suppressing drugs) when they were admitted to hospital. More than 19% of these patients did not renew these prescriptions in the three months following their discharge. For those who had been admitted to the ICU, this number increased to 23%. There was a significant risk of hospitalization or death within one year of discharge for patients who had discontinued their medications.

*C. M. Bell, S. S. Brener, N. Gunraj, C. Huo, A. S. Bierman, D. C. Scales, J. Bajcar, M. Zwarenstein, D. R. Urbach. Association of ICU or Hospital Admission With Unintentional Discontinuation of Medications for Chronic Diseases. *JAMA: The Journal of the American Medical Association*, 2011; 306 (8): 840 DOI: 10.1001/jama.2011.1206



The authors of the study discuss the vulnerability of patients during transitions. They write about the medical errors that can result from poor communication as care transitions from one doctor to another.

Furthermore, during a hospital stay, nursing staff assume responsibility for administering medications in the correct dose and at the appropriate time. In other words, the patient's routine is interrupted. When they return home, there may be new medications and the patient may believe these have replaced their previous prescriptions. Hospital stays, particularly if they involve the ICU, can create confusion or the sense of beginning a new routine. Ensuring there is support for the patient as they learn the new medication regimen is vital to reducing hospital readmissions.

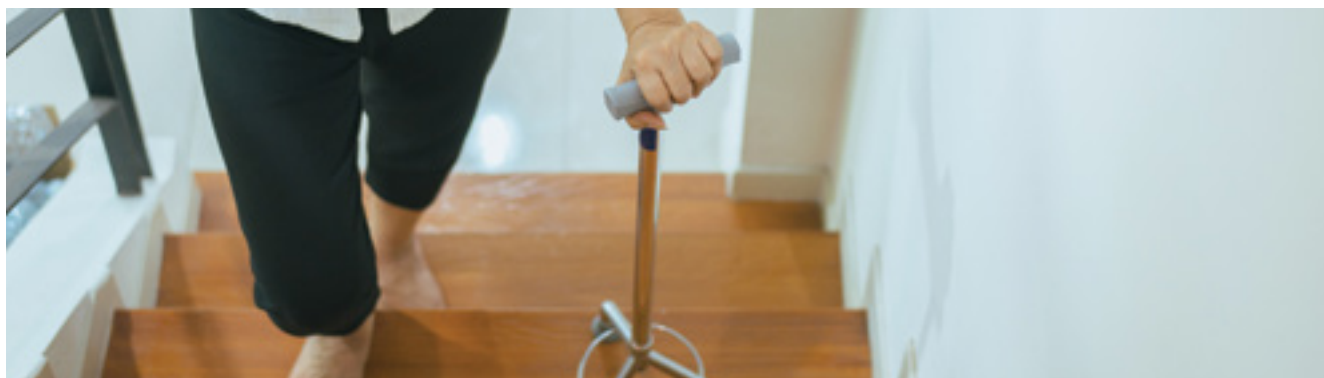
Prepare the Home

When a patient is discharged, they often need more support than they usually require. This must be communicated so that appropriate care can be coordinated. There is no benefit to the patient trying to do too much on their own. Prior to discharge, ensure the patient is seen by an occupational therapist to determine if any specialized equipment is needed at home.

Following discharge, the patient's mobility may be compromised. Depending on the situation, it may be best to avoid stairs. If possible, caregivers may want to set up the convalescent bed on the main floor so that the patient will not need to go far for the bathroom and main living areas. A Care Expert can make a house call to ensure it is ready and safe for the patient's arrival and that any required equipment is installed properly.

Getting Home

The day of discharge can be exciting, overwhelming, and exhausting. Make a plan for transportation that includes how the patient will transition into the home. Be honest with friends and family members about how they can help and provide support during this period of change. If the hospitalization was long, chores may have piled up. Friends, family, or professional caregivers can assist with cleaning out the fridge, buying fresh healthy food, tidying up, changing the bedding, and ensuring the home is a comfortable temperature.



Review Discharge Instructions

After returning home from hospital, it will take time for the patient to adjust. At the same time, there may be follow-up appointments with the patient's general practitioner, therapists, and specialists. It is important to go over all the discharge instructions to ensure all upcoming appointments are on the calendar. The discharge papers may also provide instructions about scheduling future appointments. If you work with a Care Expert, they can make these appointments, add them to the calendar, and coordinate transportation.

At Home

To ensure the patient's safety at home, it may be necessary to make changes to their living environment and overall lifestyle. These changes can seem daunting but with a plan and a little help, they can be achieved.

Rest

It can be challenging for active people to slow down while they recuperate. Additionally, during this time, friends and family will want to visit. Social contact is important, but recovery must be the top priority. Getting support to ensure the patient gets adequate rest is essential.

Dietary Changes

The doctor may recommend a dietary change during the recovery process to ensure adequate nutrition. Changing one's diet is challenging, and preparing healthy, balanced meals requires planning—especially if mobility limitations are a concern. During this time, it may be helpful to hire an in-home caregiver who can assist with nutrition and meal preparation, and liaise with the healthcare team as dietary needs change.

Exercise

After leaving the hospital, adequate rest is necessary to heal properly, but physical exercise is also important to prevent muscle atrophy. The patient should follow an exercise



regimen as recommended by the doctor or physiotherapist. Once the healthcare providers advise that it is safe to do so, the patient should attempt to get fifteen minutes of light cardiovascular exercise every day.

Regaining Independence

It is important to gradually increase independence. Caregivers can help patients make small improvements every day so that they slowly begin to do things on their own.

Avoid Exposure to Illness

Following a hospital stay, the patient needs time to build up a strong enough defense to safeguard against illnesses. Even a common cold virus can cause unexpected troubles such as infections or complications. If family or friends are unwell, they should stay away. This is another reason it may be helpful to have someone manage visitors.

Find Distractions

Following a hospital stay, it's understandable if patients feel discomfort or some pain, depending on the medical issue(s). It is important to be proactive and find ways to distract the patient. This may involve taking up a hobby, watching a favorite television show, or reading good books. It will be easier to cope and feel at ease after returning home if the focus is not on pain or discomfort.

Home Should Be Calm

While the love and support of friends and family are important to the recovery process, it is not beneficial to have excessive noise, excitement, and vigorous activity in the home. This is a time when patients need to focus on recovering. Therefore, it's a good idea to keep everyday life calm. If assistance is required for more taxing activities, support should be sought from loved ones or certified professional caregivers.



Professional In-home Care

Patients returning home after a hospital stay often find it difficult to do basic tasks for themselves. It may be helpful to have some extra support from a Care Expert to guide you through a smooth transition home and recovery. Whether they administer medication, assist with meals, handle errands or other tasks, they are an invaluable resource that will ensure everything is taken care of.

If you have questions about returning home following a hospital stay or would like to learn about how an in-home caregiver can help with recovery, contact Qualicare.

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