

Reducing Revolving Door Hospitalizations

By Judith S. Parnes, L.C.S.W., C.M.C

Any healthcare professional you talk to will tell you the worst place for a healthy person to be is in a hospital. A hospital is an important place to identify and treat a medical problem. But as soon as possible, the patient needs to get home and, hopefully, not need to be rehospitalized. In today's world of busy adult children, aging parents and understaffed hospitals, patients are being discharged "quicker and sicker." If they weren't ready to go home or if the proper follow-up care is not in place, your loved one can bounce right back in like a yo-yo. With each admission they run the risk of acquiring an infection, become more debilitated, and incur more and more expense through co-pays and deductibles.

So how do we keep our parents or older friends out of harm's way, with a hospital stay that is neither too long nor too short?

Be Prepared To Work as a Team

Before you ever have to use the word 'hospital', talk to your parents or loved ones about the possibility. Be respectful and acknowledge their privacy, but talk about how helpful this will be in the event of a sudden illness. Know what medical conditions they have and what medications they are taking. Go with them to a doctor's visit, to meet the doctor and to go over any questions you might have about what the process would be for hospitalization. What hospital does that provider go to and how they would notify you of an admission?

Help your loved one organize their insurance information and prepare a list of their medications. This list should be updated every time there is medication change, with a copy accessible in their wallet. Make sure you are listed as a healthcare proxy or, at the very least, as someone who can receive healthcare information about them. A copy of this document should be in their chart and one should be on hand for you.

If Your Loved One is Admitted

Ask questions! You want to make sure you, and the patient, clearly understand *why* they are there. What is their diagnosis? What treatments do they need? Will this require any medication changes? Will there be invasive testing needed? What is being done to keep them comfortable or to treat any pain they have? Can this care be given at home? Is a short term stay needed in a sub Acute rehab center? Write down the answers so you can discuss them with your parent or loved one. Keeping a list of the questions and answers in writing will help you remember the information later, as well as reminding you of any other questions you may have.

The Most Important Part – Planning for Discharge

Appropriate discharge and having the necessary support system in place for home are the keys to avoiding unnecessary re-hospitalization.

This is where the assistance of a professional can be especially helpful. A Professional Geriatric Care Manager is an excellent resource. A Geriatric Care Manager is a health care professional who is committed to supporting older adults and their families in maintaining independence, dignity and quality of life. Utilizing their training, knowledge and extensive experience, a Care Manager can assist you all with planning and organizing many elements of life changes.

When an older adult is being discharged from the hospital, it is essential to know: have all their symptoms abated; what medications are they still on and are there any new ones; what

needs to be watched for at home; what are their dietary needs; do they need physical therapy or a visiting nurse? All of these are concerns that a Care Manager is an expert in identifying. The Care Manager subsequently can bridge any gap between you, the doctor and the hospital. Their expertise covers finance, legal issues, organization, government programs, behavioral health and more. A Care Manager is skillful in recognizing when a discharge is premature, or overdue, and can be the extra support you need through a stressful and emotionally challenging time.

Your focus can remain where it needs to be: on all the other things necessary for getting your loved one home safely. And keeping them there.

Judith S. Parnes, L.C.S.W., C.M.C., Gerontologist And Elder Care Consultant is Executive Director of Elder Life Management, Inc., Ocean, NJ. They provide quality elder care planning and management services to older adults and their families. Please visit www.elderlifemanagement.org or call (732) 493-8080 for more information