

## Choosing a Hospital

When choosing a hospital, it is not always wise to simply go the closest facility or to assume that the biggest is the best one in your area. For the best possible results, you need to select a hospital that's best suited to your particular needs. You may not always have the opportunity to choose the hospital from which you receive care, especially in an emergency. However, when you or a loved one has a planned admission to the hospital, obtaining some important information first can help make your hospital experience a positive one.

In order to choose a hospital that's best for you, it is important to discuss your concerns and alternatives with the doctor who is treating you. But you should do research on your own too. Begin by asking your doctor about the advantages or special characteristics of each hospital where he or she practices. Your doctor can help you select the hospital that is best for you. You should also verify which hospitals are accepted by your insurance plan. Then ask the following questions to help you determine which hospital meets your needs. Knowing what to look for and what to ask will help you choose a facility that provides quality care and best meets your needs.

### General Information

- Is the hospital conveniently located? Can you and your family get there easily for scheduled as well as emergency medical care? Is it near public transportation, if needed?
- How is the Emergency Room staffed with physicians on evenings and weekends? Does it offer Urgent Care services for minor illnesses and injuries?
- Are operating room services available at all hours? How about lab and x-ray?
- Is the hospital accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting body, such as The Joint Commission? Joint Commission accreditation means the organization voluntarily sought accreditation and met national health and safety standards. The Joint Commission provides on-site surveys to review the hospital's medical and nursing care, physical condition, building safety, pharmacy services, infection control procedures and a number of other areas affecting patient care. To find out if the hospital you are considering is accredited by The Joint Commission, see Quality Check® at [www.qualitycheck.org](http://www.qualitycheck.org).

### Schedule a tour – call the hospital's public relations department and ask to schedule a tour

- Is the hospital clean?
- What are the visiting hours and are there any restrictions on visitors?
- Does the hospital offer education programs for patients and members of the community? If so, you may want to attend one to see how the hospital is represented.
- Ask to see the waiting rooms and patient rooms. Do they look comfortable? Would you want to recuperate in the patient rooms? How much privacy would you have in these rooms?
- Does the hospital explain the patient's rights and responsibilities? Ask to see a copy of the hospital's patient rights and responsibilities information.
- Does the hospital offer services that meet your particular needs? For example, do they have childbirth services or care for cancer or heart disease?
- Do you have a medical condition requiring specialized attention? Your medical history and current medical condition may affect the type of hospital you choose.
- How extensive is the hospital's experience with the type of procedure you need? Exactly how many of them have they done?
- Who is responsible for maintaining your personal care plan? How are the people who help care for you kept informed about your needs? Can you or your family easily be kept up-to-date on your care?

- Can the hospital accommodate special diet requests? Are visitors permitted to bring you food from outside? Ask to see a typical week's menu to get an idea of what is available.
- What arrangements do they have with other hospitals to provide services they are not able to offer?
- Ask about services available to meet your special needs. Ask for a patient handbook.
- Does the hospital have a written description of its services and fees? What resources does the hospital provide to help you find financial assistance if you need it?
- Ask about the hospital's success record in carrying out the specific medical procedure you need? What is the training of the doctor who will perform the procedure? Ask how often the particular procedure is done.
- Does the hospital have social workers? Ask what services the social workers provide. Social workers usually help patients and their families find emotional, social, clinical, physical and financial support services.
- Proper management of pain has been shown to speed healing after surgery. If prescribed, is the hospital prepared to provide such measures as patient-administered pain medication through intravenous infusion pump?

### **Physicians and Staff**

- Is your doctor affiliated with the hospital? If the doctor who is treating you will be performing the procedure, he or she must be affiliated with the hospital you choose. Physicians may be affiliated with several hospitals, meaning they have met those hospitals' requirements and are allowed to treat patients in them.
- What is the training of the specific surgeon or surgical team who will perform the procedure? Is the physician board certified in their specialty?
- How many nurses are there for each patient? One nurse can usually care for three to six patients, except in intensive care units (ICU) where the ratio is more likely to be one nurse for every one or two patients.
- Is there a patient representative or ombudsman on staff? If so, ask what services the representative can provide for you and your family or find out how the hospital handles a patient or family complaint.

### **Financial**

- What is the charge for a bed in a semiprivate room? Are private rooms available? How much are they? What do these charges include? What is billed separately? Find out what and how much your insurance will cover.
- If you are paying all or a portion of your hospital bill, does the hospital have a payment counselor to help arrange such things as installment payments? What resources does the hospital provide to help you find financial assistance if you need it? Does it require a deposit?
- If a procedure can be done on an inpatient or an outpatient basis, what is the cost difference?

### **Preparation for leaving the hospital**

- Ask how you and/or your family will be involved in creating the plan for your care when you leave the hospital. Ask what services are available and what your regular doctor's involvement will be.
- Ask how the hospital helps coordinate care you may need after you leave the hospital.
- Ask how staff at the hospital will teach you and/or your family members how to take care of yourself, if you are going home after you leave the hospital. Ask what teaching is provided in changing bandages, taking medications or using medical equipment or devices. Does the hospital provide you with easy-to-understand written instructions? Will they help you get the equipment and supplies you may need?