

Questions to Ask Your Healthcare Providers

Review this list of questions as you are planning and preparing for any interaction with the health care system (e.g., doctor visit, trip to the emergency room, hospital discharge planning session, etc.) The questions are organized by category. Select the questions that best fit your needs. Feel free to add your own.

About Medical Care in General

- What might have caused this illness?
- What is this illness called?
- Is this illness likely to go away on its own?
- Is the pain likely to diminish or go away?
- How do you want to treat this illness?
- What are other ways to treat this illness?
- What are the risks with these treatments?
- What is the likely future of this illness with the recommended treatment?
Without the recommended treatment?
- What is the time frame for the treatment?
- Is a hospital stay necessary?
- What is the expected recovery time?
- What lifestyle changes can my care recipient expect in the future?

About Medical Tests and Procedures

- Is the recommended test or procedure necessary to confirm or disprove a diagnosis?
- Will the findings of the test change the way the disease is managed?
- What are the risks involved?
- What happens if my care recipient refuses to undergo this test?
- How expensive is the test and will it be covered by insurance?
- Will the test require a change in any of the medications my care recipient is taking?
- What are the chances of inaccurate test results?
- What is the test procedure?
- How will the test feel? Will it be painful?
- How should I help my care recipient prepare for this test?
- Will my care recipient need help getting home afterward?
- Who will interpret the test results?

- Will someone call with the test results or should I phone for them?
- Can test results be sent directly to me or my care recipient?

About How the Doctor's Office Works

- What days/hours is the office open?
- How are medical emergencies handled?
- When is the best time to reach the doctor by phone, fax or e-mail?
- Which method of communication does the doctor prefer?
- Who can answer questions if the doctor is not available?
- Who can I call after hours or when the doctor is away?

Regarding the Costs of Medical Care

- What private insurance plans do you accept?
- Do you accept Medicaid/Medicare assignments?
- What costs are covered by Medicaid/Medicare? Supplemental insurance?
- What costs are not covered by insurance?
- Approximately how much can I expect to pay in the long run for treatment?

Regarding Discharge Planning

As part of the discharge planning process, many issues related to the patient's care need to be resolved. As soon as you know your loved one is going to be admitted to the hospital, find out who is in charge of the discharge process and arrange a meeting to gather specific answers to the following questions.

- Where is the patient going to go after discharge? (Return to the previous setting? Go someplace else temporarily? Move permanently to a new location?)
- Who will provide additional home health care if it is needed?
- Does the patient need any home health equipment? What kind?
- Do physical and/or occupational therapy visits need to be arranged?
- What additional services may be needed and for how long (e.g., Meals-on-Wheels, hospice care, housekeeping, etc.)?
- What paperwork needs to be processed to get these services lined up?
- How will the added expenses be paid for?
- What additional skills do you need to learn so you can care for your loved one properly?