

# how to CHOOSE A HOSPITAL

*The search for a good hospital should begin with your search for a good doctor. Find out where a doctor has hospital privileges before making any decisions.*

“It all starts with your relationship with a doctor,” says Rick Wade, senior vice president of the American Hospital Association. “Everyone comes to hospital care as a result of a visit with a physician.”

Research the hospital before making a final decision on a doctor, Wade says. Look at services the hospital offers and areas of expertise, he says, adding it is especially important for people with chronic conditions to make sure a facility meets their needs.

## MEETING YOUR SPECIFIC NEEDS

The Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations recommends you ask the following questions when it comes to your specific hospital needs: What is the hospital's success record in carrying out the specific medical procedure you need? How often is the procedure done? Does the hospital explain the patient's rights and responsibilities? What doctors will be involved in your care and how will they be informed about your specific needs? Are social workers available?

## COMMITMENTS TO QUALITY

A commitment to quality also is important, but can be tough to measure. Find out if the hospital measures its customer service and if it is accredited. Accreditation by the healthcare organization means the hospital voluntarily sought accreditation and meets national health and safety standards. It provides onsite surveys to review a hospital's medical and nursing care, physical condition, life safety program, special care units, pharmaceutical services, infection control procedures and other areas. Look at the hospital's mortality rate and consider the reputation of the hospital.

## ASK AROUND

Word of mouth is another good way to measure a hospital. Ask about nursing care as well. Find out if nurses have specialized training and ask about the nurse to patient ratio. Most hospital care is outpatient. Be sure to ask about after care. Does a hospital offer home care or rehabilitation?

Often, people choose a hospital based on geography. Is it close to home and close enough for loved ones to get to easily? Insurance coverage also plays a role. Investigating coverage at specific

hospitals is worth it, Wade says, noting that coverage may differ. For instance, a stay at a hospital with only private rooms may not be fully covered.

Hospitals keep much of that information on file and are happy to answer questions.

The healthcare organization also recommends you ask if the hospital has a written description of fees and services, as well as finding out about financial assistance.

## IMPROVING YOUR CARE

Once in the hospital, experts offer some tips to improve your care. Bring paper and pen to write down notes. If you are too ill to make notes, have a family member or friend help or bring a tape recorder. Record instructions for care and medications taken. Be sure to bring information about your medical records and history such as any allergies.

The healthcare organization recommends asking about hospital discharge planning. Will a plan be developed before you leave and what services are available? Will you have the training necessary to continue your care at home? Are you provided with easy-to-understand instructions? ■

## more tips...

- Ask about nursing care because you most likely will see the nurse more often than the doctor.
- Find out where your doctor has privileges. Most likely you will choose a hospital based on where your doctor practices.
- Research a hospital. Find out what services are offered and areas of specialization.
- Make sure the hospital meets your needs if you have a chronic condition.
- Check your insurance to make sure the hospital and services are covered.

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