

The Patient Channel Presents-Hospital Stays What You Need to Know

When you go on a trip away from home, even if it's only for a few days, you take the time to make detailed plans, map out your trip from beginning to end. Well you should take the same approach for your hospital stay.

Hello, I'm Dr. Colleen Conway-Welch, dean of the Vanderbilt University School of Nursing.

Going to the hospital can be an overwhelming experience, but knowing what to expect can make the visit that much less stressful. Hospital Stays: What You Need to Know will demystify the hospital experience, and help you properly prepare for any hospital stay.

Casey Borge, Patient

"Going to a hospital is like going to a foreign country. You know no one there, you don't know where to go and you don't understand them."

Narrator

Roughly one out of ten Americans will be admitted to a hospital next year. On average, they'll be in the hospital for five days. For some, it will be the result of a sudden event; for others, it will be for a scheduled procedure or testing. Either way, most of us don't know what to expect or how to prepare. This can lead to anxiety, confusion and ultimately a feeling of helplessness and fear. Casey Borge has been hospitalized more times than she would have liked.

Casey Borge, Patient

"Since I was a child I've been in the hospital once a month anywhere from three to four days. I was born with congenital heart disease. Basically what it is, is a hole in your heart. Recently, I've been in the hospital as an adult. I had to go in for cervical cancer. I was in the hospital for a day and a half and that was even more scary than going as a child. As an adult you understand the severity of anesthesia. You understand that the needles are going into your arm and you're going to be asleep soon. It's a really uneasy, unnerving situation because no matter how much you try to relax, ok relax, relax, relax you still can't relax."

Colleen Conway-Welch **Vanderbilt Medical Center**

"The hospital experience provokes anxiety for so many because of the fear of the unknown... Many patients feel that they are not able to say anything, that they lose control of their lives when they go into a hospital and that simply is not true or should not be true."

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Narrator

But what if you knew the routine, met all the players and understood your rights? Would that knowledge make you more comfortable---perhaps, even empower you? While you sit there---waiting---let us familiarize you to hospitals.

If it's not an emergency, your journey always begins in the admitting office. Here you'll sign forms allowing the hospital staff to treat you and to release medical information to your insurance company. As a matter of routine, you also will be asked about advance directives, that is, what are your wishes relating to your care? More specifically, what medical treatments you want or *don't* want in the hospital, in case you lose your ability to speak for yourself.

Ginger Ketschke, Social Worker **Vanderbilt Medical Center**

“I think people have a number of misconceptions about hospitalizations. A big one is that patients don't make decisions that the physician or insurance company makes the decisions. It's true there are influences from them but patients always have choices as to what happens and doesn't happen.”

Narrator

During the admissions process an identification bracelet with your name and the name of your attending physician will be put around your wrist. The band is for your protection and should be worn at all times as it helps to prevent any mix-ups with treatments and medications. Take a *good* look at it; make sure the information it contains is correct. Is your name spelled right? This is your passport in the hospital.

Narrator

Once you've filled out all the forms, you're off to your room. It may be a private one bed or semi-private, two-bed, room. If you are critically ill or have heart disease you may be taken to the intensive care unit or the coronary care unit. Both units have specialized equipment and highly expert staff.

Narrator

In your room, you will be asked to put on a hospital gown. They are usually not very chic, but are designed for simplicity and utility. Your valuables are then removed and carefully noted in your record.

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Colleen Conway-Welch **Vanderbilt Medical Center**

“Patients are asked not to bring valuables into hospital. It would be foolish to leave rings and jewelry or a wallet with money or credit cards in your pocket or drawer. It is wise to bring as little as you can into the hospital.”

Narrator

By now, you’re probably a little curious about the staff. Who are all the people in the hospital and what do they do? Stay tuned ...we’ll introduce you!

Narrator

After getting comfortable in your room, you’ll meet the various members of the healthcare professional team, who will care for you while you're in the hospital.

Jean Gauld-Jaeger, Patient Advocate **Vanderbilt Medical Center**

“A patient has the right to privacy, a right to confidentiality, a right to know who is treating them and what their role is.”

Narrator

Throughout the day, various hospital personnel go “round” the unit to check on the progress of the patients. Here’s a quick rundown of who’s who and what they do. Your doctor—the “attending physician”—is in charge of your overall care. He or she will visit you regularly and direct your program of treatment and coordinate all aspects from admission to discharge. In a teaching hospital, where doctors train, your attending physician often may be accompanied and assisted by members of the house staff—fellows, residents, and interns—who are physicians obtaining specialized training. With so many strangers reviewing your case, these “rounds” may make you feel uncomfortable. But they shouldn’t. This bedside visit represents a very important contribution to your care. Just remember, for the time this team remains at your bedside, every one of these bright doctors is concentrating on you! For these moments you are the most important person in their professional lives.

Colleen Conway-Welch **Vanderbilt Medical Center**

“You always have the right to ask the entourage not to come into the room. However, I would encourage you to invite them in. These are students, these are learners, these are

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the learners-the next generation and anything you can do to help them learn is greatly appreciated.”

Narrator

Medical rounds usually occur in the morning.

This is when charts and orders are reviewed and revised, if necessary. Your chart includes a brief synopsis of your medical history and laboratory test results. The order sheet found within your chart contains your doctor’s instructions about medications to be taken, treatments, testing, and diagnostic procedures to be performed as well as dietary restrictions. The staff gets all of the information about your daily routine and care from these doctors’ orders. That is why everyone involved in your care is always studying and making notes in your chart.

Rounds are the time when you have the opportunity to ask any questions or express any concerns you may have. Don’t be intimidated by all the white coats.

Casey Borge, Patient

“Sometimes you get intimidated. You feel it’s a stupid question and he’s going to think what an idiot you are.”

Narrator

Remember this is “your time.” Nothing else occurring in the hospital has greater priority at this moment. So speak up, and make sure that they understand your questions and that you understand their language and their answers.

Jean Gauld-Jaeger, Patient Advocate Vanderbilt Medical Center

“It’s perfectly fine for a patient to stop the physician and say, ‘wait, please. I’m having a hard time understanding that. Can you say that some other way?’ It’s ok to do that. The physician would rather say it again than have you misunderstand or act on misinformation.”

Narrator

Nurses, registered nurses, nurse practitioners, licensed practical nurses, nursing students and aides are critical members of your health care team. They provide many patient care services by administering medicines; checking vital signs, your blood pressure; temperature; respiratory rate and pulse, providing treatments; and teaching patients how to care for themselves.

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Narrator

The head nurse or nurse manager coordinates nursing care for each patient on the unit and works closely with the nursing staff to ensure that patients and their families receive the highest quality care and consideration throughout their stay. If you have any concerns regarding your nursing care, you should feel free to call for and talk directly with the nurse manager. Again, just as asking questions of your doctors is your right, it is equally your right to speak to nurses, if you have any concerns.

In addition to doctors and nurses, you most probably will get a visit from a laboratory technician. Blood drawing by a technician or nurse is a routine occurrence during hospitalization and is no reason for alarm. When blood is drawn multiple times it is because your doctors need additional tests to assist in the diagnosis or they need to monitor the progress of a particular treatment.

A nurse or technician may also start an intravenous or IV line. Again this is fairly routine. IVs are used to deliver medications in a highly effective manner. However, IV sites may sometimes become the source of infection. It is important that you bring any pain, redness or swelling around the IV site to the attention of a nurse or doctor.

During the course of your stay, you may also be visited by a physical or occupational therapist. These professionals work with patients to keep them mobile and comfortable and to help restore or increase the patient's ability to perform daily tasks such as cooking, eating, bathing, and dressing.

Because illness and the need for hospitalization is often such a stressful experience for patients and families, a social worker is an integral part of the healthcare team. Social workers offer support to patients and families before, during, and after hospitalization. They can help in areas such as home-care, community social services, and support groups.

Ginger Ketschke, Social Worker **Vanderbilt Medical Center**

“Sometimes we help patients verbalize their fears. They look at the whole patient and the whole process. Social workers act as liaison between staff and patient as well as between patient and family.”

Narrator

Another health professional you'll be in touch with is a dietitian. Each morning, you will receive a menu selector on which you can circle your food choices for the dinner that night and breakfast and lunch for the next day, in accordance with dietary requirements from your physician. The dietitian can help you fill out the menu and will review your selections each day to ensure that your diet is well balanced.

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Narrator

Meals arrive at approximately the same time each day. Sometimes, however, certain tests or procedures will require changes or delays in your meals. It pays to be a bit relaxed about when meals are delivered in a busy hospital.

Just be sure that the meal you receive is the correct one and that it is still appropriately warm.

Colleen Conway-Welch **Vanderbilt Medical Center**

“Hospital food really has increased in quality over the years. You will have a regular diet, which you can order, if you don’t have a medical reason for a special diet. If you need a special diet, such as a low fat or low salt diet, then your physician or nurse will order that for you. You still may have choices and you should ask if you can make some choices.”

Narrator

Wondering what your typical day will be like in the hospital? Coming up.... We’ll give you a quick peek!

Narrator

The typical day in the life of the patient is very busy and entails medical rounds, testing, scheduled procedures, meals, visiting hours and rest periods.

Colleen Conway-Welch **Vanderbilt Medical Center**

“Generally, the morning starts early. Trays arrive. Then your morning activities take place. You might be scheduled to have an x-ray or some blood drawn or just to receive your medications. Lunch arrives and the afternoon can be a series of activities. Dinner hour is early. The tray arrives between 5 and 6. There are generally few tests in the evening and generally you’re encouraged to be asleep by 10 because hospitals are not very restful.”

Jean Gauld-Jaeger, Patient Advocate **Vanderbilt Medical Center**

“There’s not an awful lot of rest that patients get in the hospital. They can ask for that though. If they ask the nurse to put a sign on the door that says please do not disturb and check with the nurse’s station before entering then they can get a little bit of control as to what happens in the day.”

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Narrator

Few hospitals permit visiting by family and friends much before one o'clock in the afternoon unless the patient is very critically ill or there are other extenuating circumstances. Regular visiting time, usually, concludes by eight or nine in the evening. This leaves the morning free for the staff to carry out the bulk of the work.

Most medications are delivered in the morning, although some may arrive at any hour. The first few times you receive medication pills or injections it is not out of line to ask the nurse or attendant delivering the medication to be sure that the name on the card is the same as that on your wrist. You should always ask what medication you are being given and why. Note the color and shape and make sure that subsequent doses match. This will ensure that you are receiving the proper treatment.

Ginger Ketschke, Social Worker **Vanderbilt Medical Center**

“When people are in the hospital, there are a lot of things going on. They’re not necessarily in bed and resting all day long. Therapy services are working with patients, tests have been ordered, different members of the team are interviewing the patient and to have a lot of visitors or people from outside around when those things are going on, sometimes makes it less effective.”

Narrator

Did you know there are laws to protect you while you’re in the hospital? Up next, what you should know about your rights as a patient.

Narrator

You have many rights and responsibilities as a patient in a hospital. Upon admission a statement of patient rights should be given to you. You should read it carefully and ask questions about anything that is not clear to you. It will contain explanations about matters such as your right to exercise “informed consent” to ensure that you understand the benefits and risks of various procedures and treatments, and your right to participate in discussions with your doctor about your medical care. Your right to privacy during interviews with your doctor and physical examinations, and the right to exercise your options to agree or refuse to participate in research experiments.

Colleen Conway-Welch **Vanderbilt Medical Center**

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“One of the things I think is important to emphasize is that you are the center of the universe. All of us circle around you. We would not be there if not for you and so you need to take back as much control and have the highest level of comfort as possible.”

Narrator

If, you feel you are not being treated with the proper respect or are not receiving appropriate care, you must express this feeling to your doctor or nurse.

If for some reason this effort fails to satisfy your need, your next step is to call the hospital’s patient advocate.

This person is charged with taking the problem to the responsible department and checking back with you to see that the problem is resolved.

Jean Gauld-Jaeger, Patient Advocate Vanderbilt Medical Center

“A patient advocate is a person who is knowledgeable about healthcare systems and knowledgeable about this institution and can serve as the patient advocate or serve as someone who can speak for the patient if the patient is unable to do that on their own behave.”

Narrator

No matter what the reason for your trip to the hospital. Whether it's an overnight visit for a few tests or a longer stay for medical treatment or major surgery, nearly everyone gets a little anxious. This is only natural. But you must remember you and your family and friends can do a great deal to influence the quality of care you receive. What matters most is your attitude. It is vital that you know and feel you have the right to become involved in and responsible for, your own care as a member of your healthcare team.

Although Casey Borge is doing better, she knows, one day, she may be in the hospital again. Now, with an improved understanding of hospitals, Casey is certain she can steer the course of any future stay successfully. You, too, should feel confident in the hospital’s mission and the competence of the staff to be dedicated and supportive partners in helping you to achieve and maintain good health...for life.