



YourCare

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION FOR THE COMMUNITY FROM CROUSE HOSPITAL

HELPING YOU TAKE A MORE ACTIVE ROLE IN YOUR HEALTH

Being an Informed Healthcare Consumer



Derrick Suehs, Chief Quality Officer

Research shows that people who take a more active role in their health decisions will live healthier lives and be more satisfied with their healthcare and treatment results. *YourCare* recently sat down with Derrick Suehs, Crouse Hospital's chief quality officer, for his take on what patients can do and what hospitals should be doing to make the most of any hospital stay.

What should patients expect from their hospital and from the team delivering their care?

You should expect that your caregivers will ask what your name is. It's not because they don't know; it's because they need to verify that they're caring for the right patient. You should expect your hospital team to be organized and prepared, and that they have a solid understanding of why you're there and what your treatment plan is.

Sometimes miscommunication may occur prior to the hospitalization – the doctor's office may use certain phrases to describe something, while hospital staff may use different terminology. When you arrive at the hospital, make sure to have a good conversation with the staff about who you are, why you're there, and what you expect in terms of the type of care or procedure you'll be getting. Your story and the healthcare provider's story – whether it's a technician, nurse or physician – should match.

What questions should patients ask – of their doctor, friends or people they trust – about a particular hospital or healthcare provider?

They should make sure the hospital is accredited by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO). This tells the community that the hospital meets certain standards for care and patient safety. Information is

available on JCAHO's website (www.qualitycheck.org).

Find out about a hospital's experience and success rate with the procedure you are having; how often do they perform it, and what are the outcomes? You should also talk with your physician about how comfortable he or she is with a particular hospital and the care provided there. Do they have any reservations about that hospital?

There are many websites out there that focus on hospital quality. Should a patient consult this information?

Anything you can do to be a better informed healthcare consumer is to your advantage, so yes. Medicare has a website (www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov) that compares hospitals and rates their quality. The New York State Department of Health also has a website you can visit (www.hospitals.nyhealth.gov). It's important to note that a hospital's overall quality cannot be expressed by the scores contained in these reports alone, so you can't necessarily draw final conclusions from the data. The reason is that some quality report websites may contain data that's two years old, which may not provide a current picture of that hospital. In addition, you'll want to know if the data has been adjusted for severity of illness. But you can and should use website quality information to generate questions to ask the hospital or your physician. →



What does 'severity adjusted' mean?

Severity adjustment is a common statistical method applied to healthcare data. It allows researchers to refine data to reflect how a hospital is expected to perform based on the patients who seek treatment at that particular facility. Adjusting the data takes into account how ill a hospital's average patient was when he or she came to the hospital for treatment. Some hospitals treat sicker patients than others.

Is it important to know how a hospital checks and improves on the quality of its care?

Improving the quality of care should be a daily focus for any hospital. One way is to keep track of patient outcomes for specific procedures. Ask how the hospital monitors and improves its quality of care. Most hospitals have a department dedicated to this function, although a quality focus should be part of the organization's overall culture. You can also ask for patient satisfaction surveys the hospital has done. These will tell you how other patients have rated the quality of their care.

have a good understanding of all medications you are taking even before you come into the hospital – prescription and over-the-counter drugs. You should feel empowered when it comes to your care.

If you feel something's not going right when you're in the hospital, what can you do?

You should feel comfortable saying "stop." You should feel comfortable asking family members to intervene on your behalf. In fact, it is helpful to the staff if you identify a spokesperson for the family. That way, staff knows who to contact to ensure that communication is being provided to the family.

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Also, feel free to say, "I'd like to speak to the charge nurse or the nurse manager." Ask for assistance from the hospital's patient advocate or guest relations representative. A hospital should

Any final thoughts?

One way to determine if you're receiving good care is the degree to which the hospital engages you in that care. Do staff members introduce themselves when they come into your room? Does the medical team keep you informed? Does your family feel comfortable with what's going on, and are they also kept in the loop on your care and progress? How does the hospital handle adverse events?

A good hospital is going to involve you in your care because they understand how vitally important that is in order to meet your expectations. If we don't ask you what you expect, then how are we going to deliver it? And if you don't tell us what's wrong, how can we fix it? Everyone has a role to play to ensure the best outcomes – before, during and after a hospital stay. This includes physicians, patients, nurses, family members, and other members of the healthcare team. We're all in this together.



As a patient, how do you make sure that you're an active participant in your care?

Either you or someone you trust should be very attentive to what's going on. Ask questions. Expect explanations from the care team about what's happening to you. If, for example, you need to have blood drawn, the nurse should explain why this is being done. You should feel comfortable not allowing something to happen to you if you're not sure why it's being done. Ask about medications being given to you. And

have support mechanisms in place for you. Don't hesitate to use them.

How important is family when it comes to receiving care in a hospital?

When you say the word "patient" you also say the word "family." A patient needs an advocate. So the family needs to be considered, not as outsiders looking in, but as an integral part of the care being provided. Family members should be kept informed about what's going on every step of the way, unless the patient specifically asks that information not be shared.



Have a question about Crouse Hospital's focus on quality care?

Give Derrick Suehs a call at 470-5776. Additional information on being an informed healthcare consumer is available from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) website at www.ahrq.gov/path/beactive.htm.

