

DISCHARGE PLANNING FROM HOSPITAL TO HOME



If your family member has been in a hospital, going home is a welcome event. But it's one that should be planned carefully. Taking short cuts, such as not reading medication instructions carefully, can lead to an unplanned and unwelcome return to the hospital.

Chances are doctors in the hospital have changed your family member's medications. The reason may be because of a change in the person's condition. Or maybe the hospital uses a medication made by a different manufacturer.

You may hear hospital staff talking about "med rec." This is short for "medication reconciliation." This means comparing the medications the person was taking before the hospital stay to the medications the person will be taking after the hospital stay. As a family caregiver, you can often give vital information to make sure this process is as accurate and complete as possible.

The AARP Home Alone AllianceSM video is a good place to start. And this resource guide gives you more information that can help you make sure you've covered all the main topics.

Here are some important points from the video:

- > Get organized.
 - Consider buying a pill organizer box that you fill yourself. Or get a pill organizer that your pharmacist prefills and labels for you.
 - Keep good medication records.
- > Don't double up on doses if you miss one.
- > Ask a healthcare provider or pharmacist about crushing pills to make them easier to swallow. Generally, it's not a good idea because crushing or cutting the pill alters the rate at which it enters the blood stream.

Questions to Ask—from Next Step in Care

The United Hospital Fund's Next Step in Care *Hospital-to-Home Discharge Guide* has additional information. Some

is presented below by permission. The guide is free and it's available in English, Spanish, Chinese, and Russian at https://www.nextstepincare.org/uploads/File/Guides/Hospital/Hospital_to_Home_Guide/Hospital_to_Home.pdf.

One of your jobs as a caregiver may be "medication management"—making sure your family member takes the right medication, at the right time, and in the right amount. Here are some questions to ask that can help you do this job well:

- > What new medications will my family member take?
- > Will your family member still take the other medications they had before this hospitalization?
- > For all new medications, how long should he or she take them?
- > Should this medication be taken with meals? At certain times each day?
- > Does the medication have any side effects? Should I expect any problems such as side effects or allergic reactions? What do I watch for? What should I do if the patient has any of these problems?
- > Can this new medication be taken with other medications?
- > Is this new medication listed in the *Medication Management Form*, along with my family member's other prescriptions, over-the-counter medications, vitamins, and herbal supplements?
- > Do I get this medication from my pharmacy or the hospital?
- > Will my family member's insurance pay for these medications? If not, are there other medications that work just as well and cost less?"

Medication Management Guide

You can find even more information in the *Medication Management Guide*, available at https://www.nextstepincare.org/Caregiver_Home/Medication_Management_Guide/.

Medication Management Forms

You can fill out the *Medication Management Form* and revise it as needed; it's available at https://www.nextstepincare.org/Caregiver_Home/Medication_Management_Form/. Both are free and available in four languages.

Another good medication management form is available from AARP. It's called *My Personal Medication Form*.

You can find it at https://www.aarp.org/health/drugs-supplements/info-2007/my_personal_medication_record.html. This form is available in English and Spanish.

Include Over-the-Counter Medications

Don't forget to include medications that aren't in pill form, such as ointments, sprays, and liquids, and over-the-counter drugs like laxatives and herbal preparations. These are also medications and can interact with prescription medications.

Going home from the hospital is an excellent time to start or update a medication record. Take it to every doctor or clinic visit and update it when something changes.

AARP Public Policy Institute

Prepared by Carol Levine, United Hospital Fund