



Access to Care

Quick Guide to Accessing Resources in the Hospital

If you find yourself in the hospital, it can feel overwhelming and confusing. Fortunately, in addition to medical care, many hospitals offer other support services to help patients. For example, hospitals may offer:

- Staff to support you during your hospital stay
- Support services to help manage stress you may be experiencing
- Documents to ensure that your wishes can be carried out if you are not able to speak for yourself
- Language assistance to help you communicate your needs and understand your medical care
- Faith-based services to help you heal in accordance with your beliefs

Hospitals have different services, so it is important to ask what services may be available to you. If you need help that a hospital can't provide, hospital staff may be able to connect you to a community organization that can help.

Staff to Support You During Your Hospital Stay

There is often a member of the hospital staff who is trained to help patients in a variety of situations. Their title may be Nurse Navigator, Social Worker, Patient Advocate, Case Manager, or Navigator. These staff can help you:

- Understand your treatment plan while in the hospital
 - Explain your plan of care, what to expect, and how you will transition home
 - Offer you or your family members supportive counseling
 - Hold a family conference where you and your family can discuss questions you have about your treatment plan
 - Communicate your feelings and needs to members of your health care team to be sure they are heard
- Address your concerns about finances and insurance
 - Explain the charges on your medical bills or help with billing issues
 - Confirm your insurance coverage for upcoming care and treatment (e.g., prior authorization)
 - If your insurance denies a treatment or service, they can help with the insurance appeals process
- Prepare to leave the hospital
 - Help with discharge planning and explain what to expect
 - Arrange transportation home or to the next facility
 - Arrange for medical equipment you will need at home
 - Communicate with other health care providers about your stay at the hospital
 - Provide community resources that can help after you leave the hospital

Besides hospitals, some insurance companies and employee assistance programs also offer these services.

Documents You May Need

A hospital may be able to provide you with some key documents that you may need while in the hospital. For example, there may be a time when you are not able to tell your health care team about your wishes for your health care. An Advance Health Care Directive is a legal document that allows you to share your wishes for your medical care. You can also choose a person to make medical decisions for you if you are unable to do so yourself. For more information about

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advance health care directives and other estate planning and medical decision-making documents, visit: [TriageHealth.org/Estate-Planning](https://www.triagehealth.org/estate-planning).

If you have not documented your wishes, state law or hospital policy will determine who is allowed to make decisions on your behalf (e.g., spouse, adult children, parents, etc.).

Most hospitals are required by federal law to have written rules that give patients the right to choose their visitors. However, in a crisis, or a moment when you are not able to communicate your wishes, it can be helpful to document your wishes about who you would like to visit you in a hospital. You can do that by creating a Hospital Visitation Directive. A Hospital Visitation Directive tells your health care providers who you would like to be able to visit you in the hospital. This document can also be used to exclude certain relatives or other visitors if you choose.

Many hospitals offer access to these documents on their websites. They are usually found under a heading, such as “Patients and Visitors.” These documents may be offered in a variety of languages.

Language Services

While you are in the hospital, you will be given important information including, information from your health care team about your medical care, documents to provide you with information, and forms you need to sign. You have a right to receive information in a language you can understand. Interpretation services should be provided by a qualified medical interpreter. Hospitals should not expect a family member to interpret for you. Hospitals cannot charge you for language services. Language services can be provided in several ways, including written documents in a variety of languages, or interpreters who can be provided in person, by phone, or by video.

If you are denied access to language services, you can file a complaint with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Civil Rights ([hhs.gov/civil-rights/filing-a-complaint/index.html](https://www.hhs.gov/civil-rights/filing-a-complaint/index.html)).

Religious Observance and Pastoral Care

While you are in the hospital you may be concerned about having your religious beliefs and needs met. Hospitals can accommodate religious beliefs, by providing:

- A chapel or prayer rooms for patients and visitors
- A member of clergy on staff or accommodations for your clergy to visit
- Private rooms or same-gender staff, to address privacy/modesty needs
- Holiday and Sabbath observance
- Meals that consider your dietary needs

Patient Rights

There are a variety of rights that every hospital patient is entitled to by law when the hospital accepts funds from the federal government. These include the rights to:

- Be informed of your rights
- File a grievance (complaint), be told who to contact to file the complaint with, and have your complaint addressed promptly
- Take part in the development and implementation of your plan for medical care
- To make informed decisions about your care
- To name who you would like to represent you in those decisions if you cannot participate
- To have an advance health care directive, which the hospital must follow

For more information and practical tips to navigate medical care, visit: [TriageHealth.org/Resources-By-Topic](https://www.triagehealth.org/resources-by-topic).



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