

## PREPARING FOR A STAY IN HOSPITAL FACTSHEET

### **Q** What happens if I need a stay in hospital?

**A** No-one likes the idea of going into hospital but it really helps if you're prepared for both your stay and for the recovery period.

Not all hospital staff understand the full impact losing the use of a limb or stomach muscles may have on you, even if it's only temporary, but taking a few simple steps can help them understand and meet your needs.

This fact sheet is based on conversations with beneficiaries who have been in hospital and advice from our Medical Adviser to help make your hospital stay and convalescence as hassle-free as possible.

### **Q** I'm going in for a planned treatment or operation. How can I prepare?

**A** If your stay is planned, you're likely to be called in for a pre-planning meeting or pre-op assessment. Make the most of these by discussing with the doctor or nurse any needs you might have whilst in hospital (both immediately after the operation and once you have recovered fully from the anaesthetic – as they may be different) and/or when you leave hospital.

It can help to take a list of what you might find difficult and what might make it easier for them to look after you; and to follow up with a written summary of what you've agreed, afterwards.

Send the summary to the secretary of the consultant in charge of your care and ask them to forward it to the appropriate staff, to make sure you get what you need.

### **What kind of things should I tell the hospital team?**

**Q** Examples of what you might include in the conversation or summary are:

- A**
- Difficulties doctors and nurses have had in the past taking your blood or blood pressure or inserting things into your veins, such as cannulae. You could take the *information sheets on bloods and blood pressure* produced by the Trust with you.
  - Any bad reactions you have had to medicines and/or anaesthetics.
  - Neck, back or joint problems that may affect how you're handled, or positioned on the operating table. If you don't usually find lying or sleeping on your back comfortable, think about how your body may react to being in this position for several hours. Things like propping your knees up with pillows may help.
  - Adaptations that may be needed to hospital equipment, such as walking frames and crutches. Healthlink can give you information on this.
  - Any help you will need with eating, drinking, dressing or going to the toilet (e.g. cutting food up, giving you a drinking straw, beakers with handles and/or lids and spouts). It is worth noting that reaching your water can be difficult as operations often greatly hamper bed mobility.
  - Potential mobility issues that you might have after an operation.

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- Whether it would be useful for your own carer to be with you in hospital.
- What should go into your plan for going home - including personal care, extra physiotherapy, specialised rehabilitation or help at home.
- Stress incontinence. If you experience even slight stress incontinence (e.g. when retching), it may be useful to have an incontinence pad underneath you before entering the recovery room.

If you're having an operation, it's usual for doctors to put a cannula into the back of your hand to administer the anaesthetic and any drugs that will help you recover, such as anti-biotics or pain relief. Think about the best place they can put it so that it doesn't get in the way or make doing things difficult; for example, if you're right handed, you could ask them to try and put it in your left hand.

Even if you've already had a pre-planning meeting, ring and try to speak to the ward sister or ward manager just before admission to remind them of your situation and discuss your specific needs.

### What should I take with me?

 Things to take into hospital with you include:

- **A few days' supply of your current medicines and a list of your medicines and dosage.** It's easy for busy hospital staff to lose track of your medication needs so it's good to take them with you, with a list of what you take, and how much. You'll need to hand in all your medicines when you're admitted to hospital except, perhaps, for minor things like Savlon or skin cream.
- **Any essential gadgets or aids you use at home** to help with things like eating, drinking, dressing, toileting, bathing, communication or sensory issues. Label them with your name and address in case they get lost. Before you go into hospital, ask the ward staff if you should take your own, bigger items of equipment, or use theirs.
- **Handy items** like wet-wipes, alcohol gel, hand-wash, tissues, pens, puzzle books, playing cards, and cash. Some people find that ear-plugs help them sleep, and a dressing stick or grabber may be useful to reach things from the other side of a bedside table.
- **Drinks and snacks**, like small boxes of fruit juice with straws, bottled water, nibbles and quick energy-boost foods, so that you don't have to rely on staff to provide them between meals.
- **Your mobile phone.** There is a myth that mobile phones can't be used anywhere in hospital. This is only true on some cardiology (heart) wards, some of the time. However it's worth checking with ward staff first.
- **Entertainment.** You can bring MP3 players, CDs, e-readers and books. While big lap-tops might not be practical, tablets such as i-pads are usually fine (but bear in mind the later point about things going missing in Hospital). Ideally avoid things that have to be plugged into the mains.
- **Toilet paper.** Hospitals often use single sheet dispensers, so you might want to take your own!
- **A small notebook and pen** to jot down things that have been handled well or, perhaps, things that haven't. You can use these notes to feed back to the hospital or to pass on to HealthLink so that other beneficiaries going into hospital are aware of these issues.

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It's also useful to take along any information medical staff might need from you, including:

- **A written summary of your medical history, investigations, results, and treatments.** The Trust can provide some of this information and you can also ask your GP for a print out of the summary from the practice record. It's best to take multiple copies so that one can be put in your medical notes and you have a spare in case the first one gets lost.
- **Any NHS letters** you've received about your visit. The hospital should have copies in your medical notes, but they sometimes go astray.

Don't assume that information you've given to one staff member will be passed on to others. You might have to repeat yourself!

### **Q Are there any other things I should bear in mind?**

**A** Here are a few more tips:-

- Things often go missing in hospital, especially things like spectacles, teeth and hearing aids, so label everything and keep an eye on it. Don't wrap valuables in tissues as staff often throw them away for hygiene reasons.
- Flowers are seen as infection risks and are not allowed on many wards
- Find out the direct phone number of your ward so that if you can't get a nurse's attention you can call them up from your mobile.....probably not popular, but effective!
- Take a printed copy of this advice sheet with you.

### **Q What if I'm not happy with how I'm being looked after?**

**A** If you are unhappy about your care while you're in hospital, discuss it with ward staff. If that doesn't help, write your complaint down and hand it to the ward staff - keeping a copy yourself. Remember to include the fact that you've already talked to people about the issue in your written statement.

Every hospital now has a 'PALS' (Patient Advice and Liaison Service) system in place, with staff who are there to represent your interests. They are the best people to contact if you're not getting satisfaction at ward level. Sometimes just asking ward staff for the contact details of PALS makes them consider your complaints more carefully.

### **Q What about when I leave hospital?**

**A** You might need equipment you have never needed before while you recover from your operation. You may be able to borrow equipment from your hospital occupational therapist or physiotherapist, or have adaptations made whilst you're still in hospital.

Take a look at the equipment information on our website under '*Everyday Living*'. It includes information on eating and drinking, going to the loo, washing, dressing and mobility. Or call HealthLink who can send you information.

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If you need it, there's also the option to rent equipment such as hospital beds, mattress elevators and other items from a private supplier such as:

[www.mobilityrentalgroup.com](http://www.mobilityrentalgroup.com)

[www.medequip-uk.com](http://www.medequip-uk.com)

[www.arjohuntleigh-medicaldirectory.co.uk](http://www.arjohuntleigh-medicaldirectory.co.uk)

**Q** Where can I get further information?

**A** If you have any further questions or concerns, you can call HealthLink on 01480 226 769