

Taking charge of your healthcare:
your path to being an empowered patient

Communicating with Patients and Families for a Smooth, Safe Hospital Discharge – Instructions for Clinicians

<http://www.patientsafety.org/page/transtoolkit/>



Hospital discharge is a risky, often frightening time for patients and families:

- They are worried they will be unable to take proper care of themselves or their loved one after leaving the hospital.
- They are called upon to digest, understand and remember a mountain of information they may find confusing.
- They may be overwhelmed by the care they will need when they leave the hospital and doubt their ability to cope with the lifestyle changes such care will entail.
- They may have so many questions they don't know where to begin, or be so afraid they can't think of a single question to ask, let alone understand the answers.

What does this mean for you, the clinician? It means you must do whatever is necessary to give patients and families all the information they need in a way they can understand, while being aware that their emotions can make such understanding difficult.

The smoothest hospital discharge starts upon admission, if not before. Review the tools for patients included in this toolkit and give them to your patients as early in their hospitalization as possible. Give patients and families time to review them. Then set aside time to go over these tools so you can give your patients and families all the information they need. You may have to go over these tools with them more than once.

Be aware that patients and families may be embarrassed to tell you if they cannot afford their medications or other items you have prescribed or recommended. If your manner toward them is kind and compassionate, they are more likely to trust you and be honest about any barriers they face. Do not assume that just because they have not mentioned a problem, there isn't one. Sometimes you will have to probe gently to find out what kind of help they really need.



Remember the following tips for talking to patients and families:

- Take your time.
- Explain things clearly.
- Ask patients and/or family members to repeat the information and instructions you have given them in their own words. If they do not understand, find different ways of explaining until they have demonstrated understanding.
- Ask for an interpreter if the patient's and family's first language is not English (do not use a family member as an interpreter).
- Use Ask Me Three™ as a framework for discussion with patients and families:
 1. What is my main problem?
 2. What do I need to do?
 3. Why is it important for me to do this?

Developed by Partnership for Clear Health Communication at the National Patient Safety Foundation.



The following resources provide more information about communicating effectively with patients and families:

Ask Me Three™

The National Patient Safety Foundation helps to promote good communication between patients, families, and health care providers with its Ask Me Three program.

<http://www.npsf.org/askme3/pdfs.php>

Institute for Family-Centered Care

By promoting collaborative, empowering relationships among patients, families, and health care professionals, the Institute facilitates patient- and family-centered change in all settings where individuals and families receive care and support.

<http://www.familycenteredcare.org>

National Transitions of Care Coalition (NTOCC)

NTOCC gives healthcare professionals tools, resources, and best practices to enhance transitions of care.

<http://www.ntocc.org>

