Creating Successful Transitions of Care
Strategies to Ensure Patients Move Safely Across Settings
In this time of advancement and of finding-the-way, the Professional Patient Advocate Institute invites you to an interactive conference to shed light on this emerging practice, provide education to like-minded advocates, and promote a culture of clinical and professional competence that will improve the health and welfare of your clients.

Please join us for The 2012 Patient Advocate Conference and take this opportunity to build your skills and knowledge while meeting and networking with like-minded colleagues and mentors. By attending this conference, you will gain:

- Strategies to meet the needs of consumers by enhancing your skills as an advocate.
- Advice from experts on how to improve your practice, regardless of the setting.
- Real-world solutions for making navigating the healthcare system easy.
- How to utilize social media platforms and make it a part of a patient advocate’s arsenal.
- Cutting-edge tools and technology that enhance patient management.
- Communication tactics and skills to achieve better outcomes.
- Skills to improve the quality of life for those with chronic conditions.
- Collaboration tactics to make it easier to gain access, information and resources from the healthcare team.
- New ideas and solutions to enhance patient- and family-centered care.
- And more!
6 Steps for a Safe Post-Discharge Plan after a Hospital Stay

By Emily Mullin
Being newly discharged from the hospital can be dangerous for recovering patients, especially elderly ones. Many patients have adverse events within a few weeks and readmissions are common with seniors and those who have chronic conditions.

According to the federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, adverse drug events are the most common post-discharge complications, with hospital-acquired infections and procedural complications also being common problems for patients after they leave the hospital.

For caregivers and patient advocates, here are some steps to follow to make sure a patient is safe after a hospital stay:

1. **Discharge communication.** Some of the major reasons why patients are readmitted to the hospital are because they don’t get structured discharge instructions, they receive unclear discharge communication or they don’t understand their discharge plan. When talking to patients post-discharge, make sure to go over their discharge instructions with them and check in with the hospital or other healthcare providers if something is unclear. Check on any pending medical tests or changes in medications and schedule any follow-up visits, if needed.

2. **Medication adherence.** The patient’s medications should be cross-checked to ensure that no chronic medications were stopped during the hospital stay. If a patient was given a prescription while in the hospital, follow up with the patient to fill it and make sure the patient knows when and how often to take the medication.

3. **Ask questions.** Here are some questions that patients or their caregivers should ask before the patient is discharged:
   - When can I expect to return to normal, daily activities?
   - What side effects can I expect from my newly prescribed medications?
   - If I have an emergency, who should I contact?
   - Do I need to schedule a follow-up appointment?

4. **Caregiver education.** Family members and other caregivers should also be educated about a patient’s diagnosis and post-discharge care plan to ensure safety and compliance. They should know what the patient’s needs are where or who to contact with questions or problems after discharge.

5. **Home modifications.** These are changes made to adapt living spaces to meet the needs of people with physical limitations so that they can live in their homes safely. In certain cases, home modifications may be needed after a patient is discharged from the hospital. Patients who are prone to falling, or ones that had falls or accidents while hospitalized, should considered various home modifications. Read this article from the Professional Patient Advocate Institute on how to secure funding for home modifications.

6. **Consider care options.** Will the patient need to care for long periods of time? Are family members or other caregivers available to help care for a patient? Look into home health or adult day care options. In many cases, a hospital can help the patient or patient’s family find licensed agencies that provide home health care and other services.
Elements of a Successful Discharge

By Richard Scott
Your client, Mr. Smith, comes to you in need of surgery. So you research the best hospital. You visit with your client’s physician. And you set up the plan of care. Good news: The surgery is a success. As soon as Mr. Smith leaves the hospital doors, you can call it a case closed. Right?

Not exactly. While the services and coordinated care that patient advocates provide to their clients is vital during the lead-up to any major medical event, the follow-up care is equally as important. In a time when hospitals are releasing patients “quicker and sicker” than in the past, the need for comprehensive discharge planning is paramount.

According to national statistics, approximately one in five Medicare patients is readmitted to an acute care facility within one month of the initial discharge. Additionally, about 40 percent of seniors endure medication errors, a potentially dangerous occurrence, after a hospital stay. On the other hand, a strong follow-up plan has proven to reap terrific quality and cost-savings outcomes. Among them are:

• Decreased readmissions.
• Better physical recovery.
• Proper medication usage.
• Safe transitions to home care or a post-acute center.

For patient advocates, understanding the care team and the “typical” discharge planning process is a critical skill. While only physicians can authorize a hospital discharge, other healthcare professionals often take charge in the follow through of the authorization. Nurses, social workers and case managers can all be involved in the process. Who leads the process depends on the structure of the specific facility.

In general, a discharge plan consists of six key steps or procedures, according to the Family Caregiver Alliance. The steps, a mix of pre-planning and post-planning procedures, include:

• **Evaluation.** A good hospital discharge plan does not begin with discharge orders or the patient’s physical exodus of the facility. It starts much earlier – with the initial evaluation of the patient by a professional healthcare professional, namely a physician.

• **Discussion.** Patient advocates should lead the discussion, along with the patient, his family and any treating healthcare personnel, as to the ultimate goals of the patient’s plan of care going forward. This will help define the discharge goals.

• **Planning.** Only after the first two steps are completed can the patient advocate begin to plan the next moves. Common discharge plans involve a transfer home, with or without healthcare services, and a transfer to a post-acute healthcare facility like a rehabilitation center or skilled nursing facility.

• **Determining.** Are the correct support systems in place? What type of care does the patient require? How will he get home? This step involves all the logistics of the patient’s transfer.

• **Referrals.** If the patient is best transferred to a post-acute provider like a skilled nursing facility the appropriate steps should be taken to secure care.

• **Arranging.** Any follow-up appointments, tests and diagnostics should be arranged prior to the actual discharge. This will help ensure that the plan of care is on track and ready to be implemented in the coming days and weeks.
6 Strategies to Provide Effective Long-Distance Caregiving

By Emily Mullin
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Even if you live far away from a patient, friend or family member who needs special care, there are still things you can do to help. Long-distance caregiving can be challenging, but if you take the right steps to understand your patient’s or loved one’s needs, you can be an effective caregiver even if you can’t make a personal visit every day.

Long-distance caregiving includes anything from providing emotional support to the patient’s primary caregiver, coordinating healthcare services for that person or managing your loved one’s expenses, medical bills or health records.

1. Become an expert on your loved one’s disease or condition. Research will help you understand what your family member or friend is going through. It will also help you better coordinate healthcare services and other needs for your loved one if you are more informed about the course of an illness, side effects and treatment options. Being more informed will also help you communicate more easily with your loved one’s physicians and allow you to act as a trusted liaison between patient and doctor.

2. Get the whole family involved. Caregiving should be a family responsibility and the task of caring for a relative should not fall on the shoulders of one person. Schedule a family meeting. If all family members can be present in person, make sure you include them on a phone call or try using Skype or another video-chatting program. Talk about how you will divvy up tasks and who will be responsible for what.

3. Put together a list of emergency contacts. This should include any family members, friends or other caregivers who live close to the patient in case of an emergency. Also include your loved one’s neighbors, physicians, including primary care doctor and specialists, and pharmacist. Have the list handy at work and home and program these phone numbers in your cell phone in case you need to contact someone when you are not at home or work.

4. Plan for the unexpected. Discuss an emergency strategy with your family members in the event that something would happen to your loved one. Figure out who will do what tasks and how you will contact each other to update other family members about your loved one’s condition. It’s also a good idea to set aside time and travel money in case you have to make an unexpected visit to help care for your loved one.

5. Talk about legal and financial issues. These may be difficult topics to bring up with a loved one, but it’s important to make any legal and financial preparations to avoid family disagreements and protect family resources. When approaching your loved one, talk about things like a will, power of attorney, trust, joint ownership and Medigap insurance. Preplanning helps to ensure than the patient maintains decision-making authority even if he or she becomes incapacitated.

6. Set aside time for your loved one. Even if you can’t always be there in person, you can still help your loved one with other tasks over the phone. Call frequently and check to see if the elder understands his or her medication procedure. Ask if there are bills that need to be paid or if your loved one needs groceries.
5 Tips on Finding the Right Specialist Physician

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Finding a specialty physician to treat a certain condition or disease should be done with care and consideration. Knowing that your patient’s health is at stake, here are some tips on how patients can go about effectively choosing the right specialty doctor.

1. Ask for recommendations. This is probably the first step most people take when shopping around for any kind of product or service. While you can easily look up doctor reviews online thanks to the Internet, word of mouth is still a powerful marketing and recruiting tool, especially in healthcare. Ask you family members, friends and co-workers if they can recommend a physician. You can often get a good feel of the physician’s personality through a trusted friend or relative’s review.

2. How far are you willing to travel? The location of the physician’s office will probably be one of the most important factors when choosing the right specialty doctor. Though if you live in a rural or inner-city area without access to certain healthcare services or specialty physicians, you may have to travel further.

3. Use your health insurance plan as a resource. Most large health insurance companies have online portals where policy holders can log on and view their health plan information and search for physicians in their network. For example, global health service company Cigna has a site for plan subscribers called myCigna.com. The website provides access to pharmacy information plus health resources and other tools. It’s important to know whether your doctor is covered by your insurance plan or HMO.

4. Do your research. Before choosing a physician, you will want to make sure he or she has the proper medical credentials. First, you will want to investigate whether the doctor is board certified in the specialty field related to your medical needs. There are a few ways to go about doing this. You can visit the website of the medical society related to the specialist’s field or the state’s medical society. To check on a whether a physician is board certified, visit the American Board of Medical Specialists website at http://abms.org and click on, “Is Your Doctor Certified?”. Most state medical boards also have their own searchable functions on their websites, where you can look up any disciplinary action information against a doctor. When you search for a particular doctor on state medical board websites, you will also be able to see if there has been any malpractice suits filed against that doctor. Keep in mind though that a doctor’s previous disciplinary history, if any, does not follow him or her out of state if the physician has moved.

5. Ask questions before you book an appointment. Here are some things to keep in mind when calling a physician’s office to book an appointment for the first time.

• What are the doctor’s office hours?
• Is the doctor available in the event of an emergency or is there a back-up physician available?
• What is the average number of patients booked per hour?
• What is the average wait time?
• If there is more than one physician in the practice, ask if you are able to choose the specialist you want to see.
• When selecting a surgeon, ask how many times a year he or she performs a particular operation and then compare that to national standards.
WebMD, a trusted online source of medical information, also has an easy-to-use searchable database to find specialty doctors in your region or city. The directory is not intended as a tool for verifying the credentials, qualifications or abilities of any of the included physicians. You can find the online tool at http://doctor.webmd.com/physician_finder.

The American Medical Association also has a searchable DoctorFinder available at www.ama-assn.org/aps/amahg.htm.
Increase Your Patients’ Compliance to the Care Plan: A 4-Step Guide

By Emily Mullin
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Noncompliance is one of the foremost obstacles in delivering healthcare effectively. The World Health Organization estimates that only about 50 percent of patients with chronic diseases living in developed nations follow recommended treatment procedures. In particular, low rates of adherence to treatments for asthma, diabetes and hypertension can contribute significantly to the human and economic burden of these conditions.

Proper adherence to a care plan can be a difference-maker for patients, leading to better overall health outcomes. As a patient advocate, making sure your clients comply with their doctor’s instructions is one of the most important things you can do to maintain or improve their health. Here are some tips to increase patient compliance.

1. Convince patients to fill an initial prescription. This is a crucial first step in adhering to any care plan. Not taking a prescribed medication could negatively impact a patient’s health outcomes in the short-term and long-term. Patients may decide not to fill prescriptions for several reasons including the cost of the medication, doubting the need for medication or preference for self-care measures other than medication. If the patient is hesitating to fill the prescription because of cost reasons, check to see if there is a generic version of the drug available or call the patient’s doctor and if there is an alternative drug that would be just as effective.

2. Remind them to take their medicine every day as prescribed. Whether it takes setting an alarm on a clock or phone or writing a daily note for patients, it’s important to encourage them to take their medicine every day as prescribed. Even if the prescription does not require them to take their medication at the same time every day, it’s easier for both patients and caregivers to remember a medication if it becomes something that is routine. If needed, create a schedule for patients so they know when to take their medication if you are not available to help them with their daily regimen.

3. Act as a liaison between a patient and physician. As a patient advocate, it’s your role to help patients navigate the healthcare system. Compliance with a care plan often relies on a strong and positive relationship between the patient and doctor. If a patient does not understand the physician, make sure to ask questions for the patient or encourage the patient to ask questions. If the patient and doctor are having a communication or trust issue, aren’t getting along or there’s a language or cultural barrier, maybe it’s time to consider shopping around for another doctor.

4. Make sure the patient understands the benefits of a treatment. If patients understand how a medication or other treatment is meant to benefit them, they are more likely to be compliant with that care plan. But even before that, patients must first understand their disease or condition and how it affects them. Ask them to explain their illness or other condition to you. Again, encourage patients to ask their doctor questions. Accompany them to physician visits, especially if you suspect that they aren’t engaging with their physician about their care. Also make sure to review the side effects of a medication with a patient.
Earn Your Certificate in Patient Advocacy

The NEW Professional Patient Advocate Certificate Training Program is a comprehensive, accelerated education program aimed at enhancing training for both seasoned patient advocates and those looking to enter this emerging practice.

Focusing on the concepts of patient advocacy, the program will help advocates meet the needs of individual clients with efficient, effective care, thereby improving patient education and satisfaction.

Goals of the Certificate Training Program:
- Provide a baseline introduction to the emerging role of patient advocacy
- Provide structure to the practice for professionals who want to add this component to their current healthcare practice
- Share insights and best practices that advocates can use to assist consumers as they navigate the complex healthcare system

A Certificate in Patient Advocacy Will Help You...
- Introduce a model of care driven by the consumer who wants to be an active participant in their own health
- Learn what Patient Advocacy means in today’s consumer driven healthcare environment
- Validate your expertise
- Improve outcomes
- Advance your practice
- Drive business
- Ensure patients have a voice in their care
- Improve patient satisfaction rates in your organization
- Ensure appropriate use of healthcare resources
- Reduce medical risks and costs
- Demonstrate your qualifications, education, and skill level to other practitioners
- Learn new avenues to expand your business
- Hone your business skills

For questions about this program, please contact clientservices@patientadvocatetraining.com or 888-707-5814.

Find out more at www.patientadvocatetraining.com