

The Road Home: Planning for a Successful Hospital Stay and Recuperation

ERCV Board member Susan Learmonth attended a November 8 workshop offered by Iona Senior Services and Forest Hills of DC, on planning for recovery from a hospital stay. She learned some worthwhile pointers she would like to share with our Village members and friends. The workshop's presenter was Jennifer Brown, Director of Marketing for Forest Hills. She is planning for knee replacement surgery in the near future, and many of the participants were also in the planning stages for some sort of elective surgery. Ms. Brown pointed out that we may plan for surgery or other aspects of aging, but we too often do not plan for what comes *after* a hospital stay.

Here are some practical suggestions shared in the workshop:

- 1) If you go to the hospital, whether for a planned surgery or after an accident, injury, or sudden illness, have someone go with you.
- 2) At the hospital, make sure you know whether you are being admitted to the hospital or just placed under observation. You may not know the difference unless you ask.
- 3) Medicare will not pay for inpatient rehab unless you have been admitted to the hospital for 3 days, even if you are not able to care for yourself and are discharged before then.
- 4) This hospitalization requirement does not apply if you are to receive outpatient or home-based therapy.
- 5) There will be lots of paperwork and you may not be feeling well, so have someone else who can help with this.
- 6) If you are having elective surgery, talk to your surgeon in advance about his plan for your recovery. If you want to have inpatient rehab, ask the surgeon, who makes the decision about your length of hospital stay and your eligibility for rehab. You will need to speak up and be insistent with your surgeon, since Medicare now sends most knee- or hip-replacement patients home in less than 3 days. If you live alone and cannot care for yourself for a week or so after surgery, going home means you will need to pay for home care, whereas inpatient rehab is fully covered by Medicare for up to 20 days. Most people do not need more than a week or two of inpatient therapy after a knee or hip replacement. Home care costs \$20-\$25 per hour for an aide.
- 7) There are 4 kinds of rehab:
 - a) Acute: very intense, usually for a stroke; often gives the patient the best chance for recovery
 - b) Sub-acute: what most people with elective hip or knee replacement receive
 - c) At-home: provided by Medicare if you are home-bound
 - d) Outpatient: provided at a facility where you go by appointment; paid for by Medicare

- 8) An option offered by Forest Hills is a stay in their Assisted Living for a week or two until you are better able to cope at home. You would receive therapy there. You would pay for Assisted Living but Medicare would pay for the therapy.
- 9) If you will be having inpatient rehab, you have the right to choose what rehab facility you would like to go to, provided there is space available. You can refuse a facility you do not want to go to, and the hospital discharge planner will have to find another place. Get to know your discharge planner as soon as you are admitted to the hospital and make your wishes known.
- 10) To evaluate a rehab facility:
 - a) Go to www.medicare.gov and look at ratings for rehab facilities near you.
 - b) If you can, visit the facility. Visit the dining area and look at menus. Look at a typical patient room and at the exercise and therapy areas.
 - c) Find out if family or a friend can be with you for therapy, meals, or whatever is important to you.
- 11) **Do not leave your rehab facility without a discharge.** Leaving against medical advice makes you ineligible for at-home or outpatient therapy. You can transfer to another facility if you wish, or you can ask to be discharged home. The medical director of the facility can arrange this.
- 12) All rehab facilities have weekly care plan meetings. Ask a friend or family member to attend with you. You will get progress reports from the therapists and make plans for your discharge home.