

15 questions before discharge

General information, not a coverage decision and not medical advice. The Next Right Step.

1. Ask whether the hospital stay is inpatient or outpatient observation, and ask for that status in writing.
2. If observation services last more than 24 hours, ask for the Medicare Outpatient Observation Notice. Medicare says the hospital must give it.
3. If a skilled nursing stay is the plan, ask how many days counted as inpatient. A qualifying stay is at least 3 days in a row.
4. Ask which day the count started, and confirm that the day you leave the hospital is not one of the 3 days.
5. Ask the discharge planner which license the next setting holds: a nursing home, a comprehensive rehabilitation hospital, or a home health agency. ?Rehab? is not a license.
6. If the next stop is a nursing home, ask whether that building is Medicare-certified.
7. Ask whether a clinician has ordered daily skilled care, such as skilled nursing or physical therapy, and what the goal of that care is.
8. Ask who decides when the skilled stay ends, and what happens in the same building if the stay becomes long-term custodial care.
9. Ask which days of a skilled nursing benefit period Medicare treats differently. Days 1-20 and days 21-100 are not billed the same way, and coverage is not guaranteed for 100 days.
10. Ask where to read this year's Medicare costs. The dollar amounts are on Medicare.gov. Do not rely on a number printed on a brochure from last year.
11. Ask for ?An Important Message from Medicare about Your Rights? before you leave. If you think the discharge is too soon, the notice explains the fast appeal.
12. Ask for the name of the Quality Improvement Organization. For New Jersey, Medicare's BFCC-QIO is Commence Health, formerly Livanta. The published helpline is 1-866-815-5440 (TTY 711).
13. Ask for a written medication list, what changed during the stay, and the follow-up appointments.
14. Ask what equipment is ordered, who supplies it, and who will be in the home the first night.

15. Ask what to do if the plan changes after you leave: who to call at the hospital, and how to reach the QIO if covered services stop.

This checklist is public. An email is not required.