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HEALTH



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8 TIPS FOR SURVIVING A HOSPITAL STAY

By MARTINE EHRENCLOU

HOSPITAL care is becoming hazardous to the patient's health.

Considering nearly a quarter of a million deaths in hospitals nationwide were found to be preventable...

However, there is something everyone can do immediately to improve the chances of surviving a hospital stay.

There must always be someone - a family member or good friend - to act as a sentinel to oversee hospital care...

1. You will act as the patient's eyes and ears.

Get a notebook. Write down the patient's name and hospital room number, the names of the physicians and primary nurses...

2. To prevent medication errors, write down the patient's medications and dosages.

List what the medication looks like, the shape and color of any pills, the names on the labels of bottles or IV bags.

3. To prevent patient name mistakes, check with each hospital staff member who either comes to pick up the patient for a procedure...

4. To prevent surgery on the wrong body part, accompany the patient to the operating room and request to see the surgeon.

Ask this doctor to write on the patient's body the correct site to be operated on and which surgery is to be performed.

5. To prevent the spread of hospital-acquired infectious diseases - among the most virulent are MRSA and pneumonia - wash your hands.

Ask every person who comes in contact with the patient, including the physicians and nurses, to wash their hands or put on a fresh pair of disposable gloves before touching the patient.

Place antibacterial gel next to the patient's bed and ask everyone to use it.

6. To prevent the need for restraints if your loved one is a fall risk, sit with the patient at all times.

Ask other family members and friends to assist you with this task and create a schedule so that someone is with the patient 24/7 to prevent them from falling out of bed.

You can also hire a sitter, companion or even a private-duty nurse to fill in for you, especially at night, during holidays or on weekends when nurse-to-patient ratios can drop...

7. To prevent bedsores, which can occur because the patient is lying

in one position too long, monitor

how often the nurses are turning

the patient.

If nurses have a heavy patient load, you can assist with turning the patient yourself. Or you can hire a sitter, companion or private duty nurse to implement this task when you aren't present.

8. Above all, try to be with the patient as much as possible.

You don't want your loved one, who might be in pain, calling for a nurse who doesn't come. Patients with involved family members get more attention.

None of these are fail-safe methods. Medical errors are generally caused by human beings, and family members can commit errors, too.

No hospital staff member is intentionally causing errors. But there is a drastic, nationwide nursing shortage, doctors are asked to see too many patients in too little time and hospitals are under financial strain.

Everyone is trying to do the best job possible. So, as a family member, you can do your part by contributing to everyone's goal: the health and well-being of the patient - your loved one. *

Martine Ehrencloou is the author of "Critical Conditions: The Essential Hospital Guide to Get Your Loved One Out Alive," available in August from Lemon Grove Press. Check out her Web site, www.criticalconditions.com.

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