Joint Replacement Surgery: After Hospital Care

A joint replacement can make a positive change in your life. For most people, the best place to recover after surgery is in their home. This booklet provides helpful information as you plan your post-surgery care needs. Having a plan before surgery can provide peace of mind and ease the transition home.

After their hospital stay, joint replacement patients either go home or to a rehabilitation (rehab) facility. Where you go will depend on not only your personal choice but your:

- Age.
- Exact surgery.
- Health status at the time you leave the hospital.
- Specific care needs.
- Support system at home.
- Medical insurance coverage.
- Your personal choice.

Home Care

Patients who go directly from the hospital to their homes will need help caring for themselves. Many patients will need assistance from home care services. Such agencies provide:

- Care oversight by Registered Nurses (RNs).
- Physical therapy.
- Occupational therapy.
- Speech therapy.

However, these services are limited. Nurse or therapist visits vary from 1 to 3 times per week for a certain number of weeks. At other times, patients, their friends or family members are instructed about needed care.
This may include:
- Wound care.
- Medications.
- Bathing/dressing.
- Exercise.

For basic care from 4 to 24 hours a day, Homemaker/Companion services may be an additional option. These services are generally not covered by medical insurance and must be paid for by the patient or family. Most services can begin after 8 to 24 hours notice. (Please note that giving medication and wound care are not included.) The hospital social worker can provide you with a list of agencies to choose from, but please remember that you or your family are responsible for making all arrangements.

Rehabilitation Centers

There are 2 main types of centers:
- **Acute Rehab** builds on the therapy started in the hospital. It allows you to gain strength and perform daily self-care activities. You can expect about 3 hours of therapy 7 days a week.
- **Sub-Acute or Skilled Nursing Facility (SNF)** care is designed for patients with medical needs beyond the routine post-surgery rehab. Many SNFs have special physical and occupational therapy programs for joint replacement patients. You can expect about 10 hours of therapy a week. As you recover, you may not have therapy on weekends.

In choosing a rehab center, it is helpful to look at both types of centers. Then, select your top 2 or 3 choices for each type. There are a number of important factors to consider in selecting a center.
- **Clinical Services** – Does the center have the services you need? How often is therapy offered per day? Who provides the care – aides, nurses? Is an RN available 24 hours a day? Is a doctor on site? What is the facility’s reputation? When visiting, ask to see the center’s accreditation and license. Most often, this information is posted.
- **Staff and Care** – What is the staff-to-patient ratio? Have you had a friend or family member at a specific facility? Did she or he like it? What was it like to visit the facility? Was the staff attentive and responsive?
- **Hospitality** – This includes the attractiveness of the facility, your room and the meals you will eat. Yours may be a shared room or a private room. Is the facility in good repair? Is the overall atmosphere appealing and welcoming? Is there art and comfortable furniture? Is there parking for guests? Is there a television, a phone or common area for visiting?
- **Location** – Would you prefer to be closer to home or to the hospital? Would it be better to be closer to a friend or family member’s home rather than your own home? Will friends and family be able to visit during your stay?

- **Financial** – Will your medical insurance source (private medical insurance, Medicare or Medicaid) pay for the services you need and desire? Is the facility you are choosing in your insurance network? Can you afford the out-of-pocket copays associated with the facility you choose? Talk with your insurance company or the facility for answers about your specific out-of-pocket expenses.

## Getting Started

Talk with your doctor and your family and friends in deciding what care option might be best for you. It also is important to know what will be covered by your health insurance.

- Most insurance payors (Medicare, Medicaid and most private insurance) will pay for skilled home health services.
- Medicare and Medicaid will pay for both sub-acute, a SNF and acute rehab centers.
- Most often, private insurance will pay for sub-acute care if you have only 1 joint replaced. Acute rehab is reimbursed only if 2 joints are replaced.
- Most often, insurance does not cover transportation to your home or to sub-acute or acute rehabilitation centers.

The discharge planning staff will:

- Assist in setting up your skilled, rehab or home care services.
- Answer any questions you may have.

They also can provide a list of:

- Home care agencies.
- Rehab centers.
- Homemaker/companion services.

## Discharge

Most often, family members or friends take patients to their home or care facility by car. If needed, the hospital social worker can arrange for transportation home or to another facility by:

- An ambulance, for medical reasons.
- Medi-Car (billed to the patient).
Other Resources

For sub-acute nursing rehab units, you can find out how an individual facility did on their last quality inspection by the government. Access the Internet and enter: www.medicare.gov.

Also, you can view the video, Choosing a Skilled Nursing Facility at the Health Learning Center, located on the 3rd floor of Northwestern Memorial’s Galter Pavilion.

Health Information Resources

For more information, visit one of Northwestern Memorial Hospital’s Health Learning Centers. These state-of-the-art health libraries are located on the third floor of the Galter Pavilion and on the first floor of the Prentice Women’s Hospital. Health information professionals are available to help you find the information you need and provide you with personalized support at no charge. You may contact the Health Learning Centers by calling 312-926-LINK (5465) or by sending an e-mail to hlc@nmh.org.

For additional information about Northwestern Memorial Hospital, please visit our Web site at www.nmh.org.

Para asistencia en español, por favor llamar al departamento de representantes para pacientes al 312-926-3112.

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