

Spine Surgery: After Hospital Care

Spine surgery can make a positive change in your life. For most people, the best place to recover after surgery is in their own 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 the hospital stay, spine surgery patients either go home or to a rehabilitation (rehab) facility. Where you will go will depend on not only your personal choice but your:

If you have any questions or concerns, please ask your doctor or nurse.

- Age
- Exact surgery
- Health status at the time of your release from the hospital
- Specific care needs
- Support system at home
- Medical insurance coverage

Home Care

Patients who go directly from the hospital to the home will need help caring for themselves. Most often, patients and their friends or family members are instructed about needed care. This may include:

- Wound care
- Medications
- Bathing/dressing
- Exercises

Some patients will have home care services. Such agencies provide:

- Care oversight by registered nurses (RNs)
- Physical therapy
- Occupational therapy

However, these services are limited. Nurse or therapist visits vary from 1 to 3 times per week for a certain number of weeks.

For basic care from 3 to 24 hours a day, Homemaker/Companion services may be an option. These services are not covered by medical insurance and must be paid for by the patient or family. Most services can begin within 4 to 6 hours after being ordered. (Note: Giving medication and wound care are not included.) The hospital social worker can provide you with a list of agencies. But all arrangements are left up to the patient or family member.

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 a Skilled Nursing Facility (SNF)** 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 get better, you may not have therapy on weekend days.

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 that 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. Your family and friends help make the best decision about the care option that is best for you. It also is important to know what will be covered by your health insurance. **Guidelines are often strict and coverage may be limited.**

- Most insurance payors (Medicare, Medicaid and most private insurances) will pay for skilled home health services.
- Medicare and Medicaid will pay for both sub-acute, SNF and acute rehab centers.
- Most often, private insurance will pay for sub-acute care.
- Most often, insurance does not cover transportation to home, sub-acute or acute rehabilitation centers.

The discharge planning staff at the hospital will:

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

They can also 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. To avoid long traffic delays, late morning often is best. (Spine patients cannot sit for extended periods of time without getting up and walking.)

If needed, the hospital social worker can arrange for transport to home or another facility by:

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

If you have any questions, please talk with your doctor.

Other Resources

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

Also consider visiting Northwestern Memorial's Health Learning Center, located on the 3rd floor of the Galter Pavilion to view the video, *Choosing a Skilled Nursing Facility*.

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.

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