

Making the Hospital Rounds

Going to the hospital can seem like going to a foreign country. Everyone there seems to know the geography, speaks the same language, and knows the routines. If you are a new patient, learning what to expect can alleviate some of the anxiety of the unknown and help you better negotiate a hospital visit.

In a non-emergency, your first stop at the hospital is the admitting office. You will be asked to sign forms that allow the hospital staff to treat you and to release medical information about you to your insurance company. You will be asked about any advance directives, which is where you indicate what medical treatments in the hospital you want or don't want in case you can't make the decisions for yourself. There are many medical professionals who will be responsible for your care:

- **Doctors** are responsible for your overall care. There will be an attending physician, who may be your primary care physician, or a doctor on the hospital staff, or a specialist. In a teaching hospital, there may be several doctors who care for you. The attending physician oversees the house staff, including medical students, residents (doctors who have recently graduated from medical school), and fellows (doctors with training in a special area of medicine after residency training).
- **Nurses** give medicines, check vital signs, provide treatments and help you care for yourself. Nurses include registered nurses, nurse practitioners, licensed practical nurses, nurse's aides and nursing students. A head nurse coordinates nursing care for all patients on the unit.
- **Physical therapists** use exercise, heat, cold, or water therapy to help build muscles, increase flexibility and improve coordination.
- **Occupational therapists** help improve the ability to perform daily tasks such as eating, bathing, dressing, and cooking.
- **Respiratory therapists** teach patients exercises to help prevent lung infections after surgery.
- **Technicians** perform tests such as x-rays, and procedures such as taking blood.
- **Dietitians** help plan specialized menus.
- **Pharmacists** prepare medicines used in the hospital.
- **Social workers** help you learn about home-care, social services, and support groups.
- **Discharge planners** arrange for health and home care needs after you leave the hospital.

There are many areas in a hospital. The intensive care unit (ICU) has special equipment and staff when you are very ill. Coronary care units (CCUs) give intensive care if you have severe heart disease. Surgery is performed in the operating room (OR). After surgery, you will spend time in the recovery room before going back to your own room.

Before you go home, your doctor will write a discharge order, and you will need a release from the hospital business office. The discharge planner will talk to you before you leave to help with your needs after you go home. The discharge planner helps arrange for a visiting nurse, hospital equipment, or other services; and, if needed, they know about rehabilitation centers, nursing homes and other long-term-care services.

Source: NIH

