



Will Power

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REDUCING HOSPITAL READMISSIONS

My husband had knee surgery, but about 10 days later he had to go back to the hospital to treat an infection. Is this common?

A: Sadly, yes. Hospital readmissions are a serious problem for patients and their caregivers. Readmissions lengthen recovery time, rack up co-pays, and keep you from resuming your life. Readmissions are also a major concern for Medicare, and other insurance payers. Medicare Part A pays 100% of acute in-patient hospitalization, so they really want you to avoid going back in.

Under the Affordable Care Act, Medicare (The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services) told U.S. hospitals to reduce their readmissions or face cuts to their reimbursement. In 2015, over 2,600 U.S. hospitals were penalized. Hospitals are doing what they can to reduce readmissions, like making sure patients have adequate follow-up at home and understanding their medications.

Whether you have a planned hospital stay or an emergency, it is essential that you understand the role you play in avoiding a hospital readmission.

PLAN AHEAD: Before you go into the hospital, plan for your return. If you have stairs at home, can you sleep downstairs for a few days? Stock the pantry and bathroom. Clear clutter. Let neighbors and friends know you will be home recuperating. Community and home support is a major factor in re-hospitalization.

JOKE OF THE MONTH

"My career as an astronomer didn't work out. I guess it wasn't in the stars."

ASK QUESTIONS: Patients have a right and an obligation to understand and participate in their care. Ask as many questions as you like. Bring a notebook to keep track of questions and answers.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS: You may appeal a hospital discharge if you think it's too soon. If you do not feel safe going home, you probably aren't. You might go home with a family member for a few days, or stay an extra day in the hospital. This is also your right.

Use your mindfulness when talking to the hospital staff about discharge. Listen attentively to the instructions given. Take time to process the information and formulate questions. Take a moment to visualize yourself recuperating at home. That will help you foresee potential problems and create solutions before you get there.

Resources:

"More U.S. Hospitals To Receive 30-day Readmission Penalties"
by Sabriya Rice, October 2, 2014 available at:
<http://www.modernhealthcare.com/article/20141002/NEWS/310029947>

"Care About Your Care"
by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation,
available at:
<http://www.rwjf.org/en/library/features/care-about-your-care>

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CUSTOMER SERVICE IS MAKING A COMEBACK!

Perhaps it's the purchasing power of the Baby Boomers, an increasingly competitive marketplace, a backlash against automated phone trees, or the threat of a negative online review. Whatever the cause, offering quality customer service has become a focus for retailers, airlines, hotels and restaurants. Other nontraditional outlets, like hospitals and banks, are looking to make your experience with them more pleasurable. They constantly send you surveys or offer incentives for your opinion.

Here are some tips to get the most out of the customer service department:

1. Speak to a person, face-to-face if possible. Learn the person's name and thank them for their help. Rapport gets them invested in helping you.
2. Share compliments, as well as criticism. Most people at these establishments work hard and appreciate recognition.
3. Never threaten or get angry. If you have a dispute, approach it from a teamwork perspective: "Let's solve this together." Remember, it is possible that you have contributed to a problem by not reading the small print or paying close attention.
4. Ask for assistance, rather than demand a resolution. Example: "Can you please help me understand why I was charged X when the tag says Y," rather than "You crooks owe me the difference between X and Y!"

5. Ask if there is a "customer retention" department or specialist. Most companies understand that the value of keeping a customer is greater than the expense of attracting a new one.

6. Be prepared to walk away. If you have received an inferior product or disappointing service and can't get satisfaction, find an alternative provider. Regulated organizations, like hospitals and insurance companies, offer a formal grievance process. If you don't get anywhere with customer service, exercise your right to file a grievance.

7. Have a goal in mind, but be flexible. If you want a refund, be prepared to accept a replacement instead. If you want someone fired, ask instead that the company change its policy or procedure to avoid problems in the future.

With the right attitude and preparation, you can get what you need from customer service, and maintain a great relationship with the vendor or service provider. That is what you call a "win-win."

Resources:

"The Top Companies for Customer Service" by Caroline Mayer, June 4, 2012 available at:
<http://www.nextavenue.org/top-companies-customer-service/>
<http://www.clarkhoward.com>



QUOTE OF THE MONTH

*You've got to admit that each party is worse than the other.
The one that's out always looks the best. - Will Rogers*

