



Discharge Planning

How can I plan for my loved one's discharge from a hospital?

Family members and loved ones often find that their opinion about whether someone is stabilized and ready to be released from a hospital may differ significantly from those making discharge decisions. This makes it all the more important to engage wherever and however possible with the treatment team throughout the person's stay. While it may not be possible to change a discharge decision, engagement is the best chance to see that discharge plans are based on the most complete information possible and not dependent on assumptions that may be incorrect.

The first thing an inpatient facility does when they admit a patient is start a plan for discharge. As for any medical condition, discharge planning is a process to identify and prepare for anticipated health care needs after the patient leaves. The plan may change throughout the patient's stay, and families often can influence this process by communicating with the hospital's discharge planner (usually a social worker). For example, family may be able to help find suitable housing if the patient is homeless or unable to return to the home they had before being hospitalized.

If supporting family are willing to take their loved one home, that is often the preferred discharge plan. In fact, our society has become very dependent on family members and loved ones acting as de facto caregivers. Many, however, are unable to accept their loved ones at home due to dangerousness, drugs, the needs of others in the home, and more. Families and loved ones need to be clear about their boundaries and reject pressure to ignore safety concerns, despite how painful these decisions can feel. It is not a rejection of a loved one; it is a recognition that those supporting people with severe mental illness are entitled to their own safety and wellbeing.

If your loved one is being discharged and has signed a release of information (ROI) so facility staff can speak with you, be sure to ask for information about discharge planning before your loved one leaves. After they leave, staff may be unwilling to honor the ROI or help you locate your loved one in the community.