

## Chapter Nine

### DISCHARGE AND HOME CARE

Discharge is considered a “hand-off” and carries additional risks and responsibilities for patients and advocates. Leaving the hospital is often the beginning of new and challenging duties such as caring for a wound or managing a more complicated medication schedule. The following bullet point lists will help you stay on track.

#### DISCHARGE INSTRUCTIONS

- ☐ **Does the patient need help at home** or will he be able to care for himself? If help is needed, can a **discharge planner** help with the process?
- ☐ The patient should have a clear, readable copy of the **discharge instructions and the Discharge Summary**. It should be clear when bandages should be changed or removed and when the patient can walk, bathe, drive, or return to work.
- ☐ Be sure you **have the names and dosages of discharge medications in writing**, especially if new medications have been added to the care plan.
- ☐ Be sure the discharge documents contain **the phone number of the doctor** to call if there are questions.
- ☐ Has the **hospital communicated with the patient’s regular medical doctor** about the details of the stay?
- ☐ Is the patient being discharged home or to a **skilled nursing facility**? If discharged to a facility, how long is he or she authorized to stay?
- ☐ Does the patient need to perform **wound care** or deal with surgical drains?

#### FOLLOW UP CARE

- ☐ **When is the patient to return for follow-up?** Which doctor is she supposed to see?
- ☐ **Will a visiting nurse be needed?** If so, have orders been written and authorization obtained?
- ☐ **Does the patient need physical and/or occupational therapy?** When should therapy start and who will schedule it?
- ☐ **Will the patient need any medical equipment** such as oxygen, wheelchair, hospital bed, commode, or walker? Has the order been placed? When should it arrive? Is it covered by insurance?

- ☐ **Does the patient need to monitor any vital signs** at home such as blood pressure or temperature? Should these numbers be written down to share with the doctor?
- ☐ Does the patient have **dietary restrictions** or need **nutritional supplements**?

## HOME MEDICATIONS

- ☐ Will medications be provided by the hospital or will they **need to be picked up from an outside pharmacy**? Will the medications be picked up and started right away? In many situations, it is important to start home medications immediately. Let the staff know if you expect any delays in obtaining medications to use at home.
- ☐ Have new medications been **evaluated for drug interactions** with the patient's regular medications?
- ☐ **Will the patient be using narcotic pain medications?** Be aware that narcotics can cause dizziness, loss of appetite, constipation, and hallucinations. Are stool softeners needed to prevent constipation?
- ☐ Ask if any pain medications contain **acetaminophen or ibuprofen**, which are the ingredient in Tylenol and Advil. If so, be sure the patient **does not take additional Tylenol or Advil** at home – it can cause liver damage and bleeding. Check all over-the-counter medications for acetaminophen or ibuprofen – it can be present in cold or sinus medications and sleep aids.
- ☐ **Do not drink alcohol** while taking pain medications. Not even a small amount.

The following are symptoms that can be signs of serious complications. Always know who to call to report any of the following complications:

- ✓ Know the **signs of clots: swelling, redness or breathing difficulties**. Should the patient be up and walking to prevent blood clots? Does the patient need blood-thinning medications? Realize that clots can occur weeks after leaving the hospital.
- ✓ Know the basic signs of **wound, blood, or urinary tract infection**: fever, redness, rashes, swelling around incision, pain, drainage from incision, and painful urination.
- ✓ Know the signs of **internal bleeding and shock** including shortness of breath, pale skin, or feeling cold, low urine output, mental confusion or rapid breathing.
- ✓ Know whom to call if advocate notices **loss of appetite, weight loss, depression, anxiety, or insomnia**.