

# CHOOSING A HOSPITAL: Guidelines for the Consumer

When consumers purchase cars or homes, they are usually well prepared and knowledgeable as to what they want and need. However, patients often do not consider themselves “consumers” of health care empowered to make proactive decisions regarding where they receive hospital services.

For non-emergency hospital services, consumers now have options and access to a wide array of information. As a result, becoming a proactive consumer in choosing hospital services is a real opportunity in today’s market as compared to those times where a consumer had no choice but to go to the nearest hospital, which was often the only hospital in his or her town.

Increased competition has resulted in hospitals attempting to develop a unique brand in their market through increased advertising. There are now numerous websites and companies geared towards offering consumers information about hospitals, such as hospital rankings and other statistical data. The flipside to this increase in available information is that it can be difficult to decipher which factors are most important. The choice of a hospital may have implications well beyond the usual two or three day stay. Therefore, it is important to consider the entire process and certain factors that may be more relevant, such as those discussed below.

Consumers should ascertain whether their primary care physician or specialist has privileges at a given hospital and whether the hospital has the capability and capacity to treat a particular illness or condition. The nurse-to-patient ratio is another factor which may affect the quality of care in terms of the attention the consumer may receive. Further, consumers should know whether the hospital is a full-service provider that can provide diagnostic and/or ancillary services on an outpatient basis or post-hospitalization services, if appropriate, to possibly avoid traveling to multiple facilities for services. Similarly, for further convenience, consumers should consider the logistics of the hospital, such as the location or nearby accommodations for family members wishing to accompany the consumer.

Knowing whether the hospital is an academic medical center or has a transfer arrangement with such centers to treat complex conditions or complications may also be advisable. Likewise, consideration of the hospital’s accreditation and established reputation in certain specialties is important. Additionally, the consumer should know if the hospital provides the most current medical research and/or treatment options or procedures; and whether the hospital offers informative courses, support groups, counseling, and other related services or resources.

Another important factor is the hospital’s compatibility with the consumer’s culture, such as preferred language, religion, and his or her outlook on life and death issues. It is essential for the consumer to gain a full understanding of his or her condition; and the options and the courses of treatment available that are consistent with the



consumer’s religious beliefs and outlook on life and death.

Similarly, financial matters may be significant with regards to the consumer’s ability to obtain treatment at a particular hospital. A consumer should initially determine whether the hospital is a participating provider in his or her health plan. In the event the hospital is not, then the consumer should discern the type of payment programs offered by the hospital, and his or her financial responsibility.

Consumers should be proactive and make informed choices when it comes to selecting the right hospital for his or her needs. The good news is that with all of the information and resources currently available, consumers have never been more empowered regarding their choice of health care provider. ↗



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