Making Hospitalization Easier
Mary Beth Parks, R.N.
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Hospitalization for anyone is a scary situation these days. Hospitals are under-staffed and very often the patients have to wait to be admitted. With that in mind, here are a few tips to make the process easier for both patients and families or friends accompanying you. If your admission is for a scheduled procedure, bring along your medical history. This is generally a log of events since your diagnosis, physicians’ phone numbers, and a list of your current medications: dose, frequency, and start date.

If there is equipment that you will be bringing with you, remember to put your name on it. A simple address label with your phone number placed on your wheelchair, splints, cane, or dynavox machine will help safeguard it in case it is misplaced. ALS patients are generally admitted at some point for placement of a feeding tube. This procedure is quite simple and is not considered life threatening. However, anyone undergoing any surgical procedure will be asked questions that you should be prepared to answer. Advanced Directives, Living Wills, or Health Care Power of Attorney forms will ask you to list people to help make decisions for you in the event you cannot. Spouse, parents, children, or best friends are the people that know what your wishes are and generally chosen. Your physician will be asked his advice, but is not able to make those decisions for you.

I would strongly recommend that a family member or friend stay with a patient during their hospitalization. Getting assistance for the bedpan, a sip of water, or just being understood if you have trouble speaking can be difficult if the nurse assigned to you has a heavy patient load. Remember to thank and compliment those who help you. Nurses always remember the kind patients and will go out of their way to be helpful. If the patient has a special need, make a poster and place it over their bed. That way everyone knows and the patient can avoid confusion and frustration. Examples of the types of information that would be useful include: “Bill uses Dynavox to speak”, “Joe has hearing aide on left ear”, or “Please place food on Susan’s left side”.

Patients are anxious to get discharged but don’t be too anxious — remember these few things to make that transition smooth. Do you need a home care nurse to visit after discharge? If so, have a social worker help make those arrangements before your discharge. What are your new medications and do you know what schedule they were on in the hospital? Who is writing the prescription? Call your pharmacy from the hospital to make sure they carry those medications: you may need to fill them at the hospital or take a few doses with you. When does the physician want to see you next? Who should you call if a problem arises?

Once you make it home, take a good nap and relax. Get yourself organized after that nap. Remember, there’s no place like home.