



Safely Reducing Hospitalizations

CONSUMER FACT SHEET

Advancing Excellence in America's Nursing Homes is a national campaign that began in September 2006. Our goal is to improve the quality of care and life for the 1.5 million people served by nursing homes in the United States. Nursing homes and their staff, along with residents and their families and consumers can join in this effort by working on the campaign goals that are designed to improve quality. We do this by providing tools and resources to help nursing homes achieve their quality improvement goals. To learn more about the campaign, visit www.nhqualitycampaign.org.

This fact sheet is about safely reducing hospitalizations.

Why is this goal important?

People in nursing homes are often sent to the hospital when they get sick. Sometimes this is the best thing to do. At the same time, it can be risky for very frail older people. Hospitals and nursing homes are trying to make care better so hospitalizations are less frequent. There are things the nursing home can do so that people are less likely to need to go to the hospital. Nursing homes working on this goal will do three key things. They will:

- Give people the best care they can when they get sick;
- Make sure they respect each person's wishes about care; and
- Safely reduce transfers to emergency rooms (ERs) and hospitals that they can prevent.

What are the benefits for residents of not being transferred?

Nursing home residents as a group of people can be very vulnerable. Many are frail, have long-term illness and have dementia. A hospital stay, or even a visit to the ER, can make things worse. Your nursing home should have good care plans in place. This includes planning for any changes in your condition that might happen. When they do this, they may do a better job than a hospital. Some of the benefits of being treated at your nursing home are:

- Staff members know you. They know what you like and are able to meet your needs. This is even more important if you are living with dementia.
- Nursing homes know that well-being is better when you are active and social.
- You will not lie in bed by yourself for long hours like in hospitals.
- Staff also knows your family. This can help with communication and decision making.
- Staying in a place you know is soothing. You may be less confused or depressed. You are less likely to have delirium.

- Riding in an ambulance can be painful. There can be long waits in a noisy ER. This can be scary or confusing, especially if you have dementia.
- Important information won't get lost between the hospital and your nursing home.
- Nursing homes know what drugs you are taking, so mistakes are less likely.
- You are more likely to be helped to toilet than have a catheter put in your bladder. Catheter use happens often in hospitals.
- You are safer from serious hospital infections.
- You are less likely to get pressure ulcers.

What are some reasons you should be transferred to the hospital or emergency room?

In some cases, sending you to a hospital is the right thing to do. Reasons can be:

- You can't get needed care in the nursing home. This can happen when your care needs change. For example, if you now need a ventilator and your nursing home doesn't offer this service.
- Need for special tests or treatments such as MRI's or radiotherapy.
- Your doctor (or nurse practitioner, physician's assistant) feels hospitalization is needed.
- Family members may insist.
- You ask to go to the hospital. You may also have an advance care plan, or living will, that says you want to go to the hospital if you become ill.

What can you do to make sure you get the best care?

Talk about hospitalizations with family and friends early. Don't wait for a crisis! Your wishes can only be followed if people know what you want. If you aren't sure, give someone your "health care proxy." If you cannot speak for yourself, your health care proxy can legally make medical decisions for you.

Here are some other things you can do:

1. Join in on care planning sessions. These happen at least every three months. Your wishes and choices should be part of your care plan.
2. If you are able, tell the staff if you notice a change in how you feel. They should listen and respond. They should get in touch with your doctor, who can order tests. They should also follow-up with you and your family.
3. Ask questions. Find out what your nursing home can do to safely avoid sending you to the hospital. Advancing Excellence has [a list of questions](#) you can use to learn about your nursing home's capabilities. Once you know this, talk with the doctor or nurse. This will help you know how they can help with your medical needs and emergencies.
4. Ask how family and friends will find out if your health changes. Ask how they will hear if you have to go to the hospital. Find out how your family and friends can be involved if you are moved.
5. If you are moved to the hospital, ask your nursing home what you need to do to come back to your same bed in the home. (This is called a "bed hold" policy. See the fact sheet on [Financial Implications of Hospital Transfer for Nursing Home Residents](#) for additional information.)

6. Think about what you want done or not done if you get sick. Make an advance care plan and give a copy to the staff. Make sure they read it and agree to carry it out. If you want help with advance care planning ask the staff for information. Advancing Excellence has prepared a two page [Fast Facts: Advance Care Planning](#) information sheet to help you get started.
7. Talk to the nursing home managers if you have questions or concerns about hospitalizations. You can ask the director of nursing, social worker or administrator. If you still have concerns, call your Long-Term Care Ombudsman. (Their contact information should be posted in the home.)
8. Encourage the home to participate in the [Advancing Excellence Campaign](#) and make use of the tools and resources on the website.

Resources

Advancing Excellence Questionnaire to Help Families and Residents Talk to Nursing Homes about Treatment Options

http://www.nhqualitycampaign.org/files/AE_HealthRelatedServicesQuestionnaire.pdf

Advancing Excellence Cost Information for Nursing Home Residents Who Face Hospitalization

http://www.nhqualitycampaign.org/files/AE_CostInformationResidents.pdf

Advancing Excellence Advance Care Planning Fast Facts

<http://www.nhqualitycampaign.org/files/factsheets/Consumer%20Fact%20Sheet%20-%20Advance%20Care%20Planning.pdf>

The National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care, Care Planning Fact Sheet

<http://www.theconsumervoice.org/sites/default/files/resident/nursing-home/assessment-and-care-planning.pdf>

Advancing Excellence in America's Nursing Homes Campaign website

www.nhqualitycampaign.org