

5 Questions to Ask Before a Loved One Leaves the Hospital

The day a loved one is discharged is one of the most dangerous moments in their whole hospital stay. Families are handed a stack of papers, a discharge nurse is rushing, and everyone is so relieved to go home that the most important questions never get asked. After thirty years as a nurse, I have seen how often families end up back in the emergency room within days, not because the care was wrong, but because no one made sure the family understood the plan. Here are the five questions I want every family to ask before they walk out those doors.

1

What exactly changed, and what is the plan now?

Ask them to explain the diagnosis and the plan in plain language, not medical terms. If you cannot repeat it back in your own words, ask again. You are not being difficult, you are being careful.

2

What are the new medications, and what did we stop?

Get the full updated medication list in writing. Ask specifically which old medications to STOP, which to continue, and whether any interact. Medication changes at discharge are the number one cause of readmission.

3

What warning signs mean we call, and who do we call?

Ask exactly which symptoms mean call the doctor, which mean go to the ER, and get the direct phone number for questions after hours. Write down who to call before you need them, not during a crisis.

4

What follow-up appointments are needed, and are they booked?

Do not leave without knowing which follow-ups are required and by when. Ask the hospital to book them before discharge if they can. A missed follow-up in the first week is where recovery quietly falls apart.

5

What help will we actually need at home?

Be honest about what the days ahead really look like. Ask about equipment, home health, wound care, bathing, and getting to appointments. Most families underestimate this, and asking now prevents a crisis next week.

One More Thing



If reading this made your stomach tighten because you are already in the middle of it, please know you do not have to hold all of this alone. Coordinating a loved one's care while you are frightened and exhausted is not something families are ever taught to do. It is what I do every day.

As a private patient advocate, I sit beside your family and help you understand what is happening, organize the medications, prepare for the appointments, and coordinate care across every doctor involved, so nothing falls through the cracks and no one feels alone in it.

Every family begins with a free call.

A no-pressure conversation to talk through what you are facing.

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