

Do I Have a Say in Where I Go for Rehab After Surgery?

By Kim Petrone, MD

Whether the new year finds you facing surgery or rehabilitation from a stroke or accident, there's an important question to answer: Where will you go to get the care and therapy you need to return to health?

Many patients feel they must go to the facility their doctor recommends. The truth is, the choice is entirely yours. No one can force you to go to a particular place for rehab (also known as transitional care). So if you're planning elective surgery, why not take the extra step to pre-plan your rehab stay?

Visit your potential choices and ask for a tour. Find out about their clinical outcomes. Make sure they have the sub-specialties to address all of your needs. For example, the Wegman Transitional Care Center at St. Ann's offers physical,



occupational and speech therapy, which are necessary for patients recovering from stroke or a head injury. Look for a unit offering comprehensive care.

Other points to keep in mind:

■ **Admission seven days a week:** Many facilities will not admit patients on Sundays or in the evenings. Choose a facility that will be ready when you are, with medical staff available to evaluate and treat you immediately.

■ **On-site medical staff:** Not every facility has a dedicated medical team. Choose one that gives you access to skilled medical personnel

whenever you need them. And ask about the nursing staff. Some facilities have nurses who "float" between departments. Your needs are not the same as those of patients on residential floors, so look for a place whose nurses specialize in rehab.

■ **Sub-specialties:** Is the transitional care unit focused on a specific kind of rehabilitation, like joint replacement? Or does the medical staff have significant expertise in other areas? Many patients need multiple kinds of therapies to return to health. For example, swallowing therapy can be important for patients with brain injuries, and even for some cardiac patients. Look for board-certified specialists on staff and a variety of sub-specialties.

■ **Intensive therapy:** You want to get better and go home, so select a transitional care center where patients receive therapy throughout the day. Thirty minutes of therapy a day is the absolute bare minimum for Medicare Part A, especially if you need several kinds of therapy (physical, speech, swallowing, etc.). The harder you work, the sooner you'll go home.

■ **On-site pharmacy:** The last thing you want to do is wait around for a cab to arrive from an outside pharmacy with the medication you need! Choose a transitional care center with its own pharmacy, so you can get your meds in minutes instead of hours.

Just as you pre-plan your surgery, pre-plan your rehab stay. You'll know exactly where you're going, and they'll be ready to welcome you. That peace of mind is something you'll appreciate when the time comes.



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