

Mental Illness & the Family: Is Hospitalization Necessary?

Of the 5.4 million people who sought mental health treatment in 1990, less than 7% required hospitalization. More than half of those who needed inpatient-care had schizophrenia, one of the most severe forms of mental illness. If you or someone you know may have a mental illness, the chances are that you will not need hospitalization. But, if you do, the following information will help assure you of the best care possible.

Questions to Ask:

- Has the person been professionally evaluated? By whom? Do I understand the diagnosis?
- If the patient has not been evaluated, why am I seeking admission for the person? a) A doctor's recommendation? b) Need to have patient removed from family situation? Why? Because of behavioral problems? c) What are they? Because family cannot care for him or her? Why? d) What symptoms is the patient exhibiting which cause concern?

The Hospital/Treatment Center at Check-In:

- Does your facility treat patients only for this specific diagnosis?
- If the patient has other health or emotional problems will he/she receive treatment for these problems also?
- Does your facility require tests when admitted? If so, what are they?
- Who will perform these tests?
- Who will evaluate the patient when he/she is admitted?
- What are the person's qualifications/ title?
- Will this person continue to treat the patient?
- Will the patient be seen by this professional on a regular basis?
- When will the initial evaluation take place?

During the Patient's Stay:

- When can I (or another family member) talk to the therapist or doctor?
- Will we be able to discuss treatment with the doctor or therapist? When? How often?
- When can family members visit? For how long?
- Will the patient be allowed to receive phone calls?
- Will the patient have a daily schedule of activities or treatments?
- If so, what activities will the patient be involved in?
- Is therapy group or private and is it part of the treatment plan?
- What clothes should the patient bring?
- How long will the patient be at the facility?
- Who makes this decision?

- Will the family be advised of changes in treatment?
- Who will make the evaluation for discharging the patient? When will this happen?

Leaving the Hospital:

- Will someone advise the patient and family about adjustment concerns such as the need for further counseling or a medication schedule?
- What can we expect when the patient is discharged?
- Will he/she be on medications? Which ones?
- How will these medications help? Are they habit-forming? What are the side effects? What is the dosage?
- How long will the patient have to take this medication?
- If the patient leaves the hospital without permission how will the hospital handle this?
- If this occurs, what is the parent or family's responsibility?
- Will the patient be able to continue school work while in the hospital? Or how soon after he or she is discharged?
- If classes are offered to patients, what are they and who teaches them?
- What follow-up treatment or support group options should the family and patient consider?

Financial and Insurance Issues: Ask the treatment center and/or insurance company:

- Does the hospital accept this type of insurance? If not, what are the alternatives? If it does, what is covered?
- Can coverage be reviewed with a member of the staff?
- Are there separate charges and how much are they for physicians, therapists or caretakers? What may these separate charges be?
- How are fees assessed?
- When will billing occur?
- If insurance only covers part of the cost, what other arrangements can be made for payments?
- Is there other assistance available? Will the facility accept partial payments or payments on a schedule?

Ask the Therapist:

- What can the patient and family expect during the treatment process?
- What can be the expected reactions/behaviors of the patient?
- How should the family respond?
- How can the patient and family prepare for unexpected behavior and possible setbacks?

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