A “Survival Guide” Offers Practical Tips for Making Hospital Stays Less Traumatic for Patients

Being in the medical field, you have probably heard about people who went to the hospital to have surgery on their right knee and wound up having their left knee operated on instead. You might even know someone who was prescribed an incorrect dose or the wrong type of medicine and subsequently went into a coma.

As you are aware from the media and P&T’s own “Medication Errors” department, medical mistakes are still rampant in hospitals today and continuously threaten the quality of health care delivered in the U.S. The quality and safety of health care will improve only with the collective efforts of the various stakeholders in the industry: providers, patients, and payers. Although much has been written about how federal and state governments, hospitals, and private organizations can increase their involvement in this area, information that patients can easily understand and readily put into action is not as prevalent.

Dr. David Sherer’s Hospital Survival Guide is an insightful and easy-to-read book on making a hospital stay as safe and relaxed as possible. Dr. Sherer, an anesthesiologist, and his co-author, an experienced writer in the health field, describe steps patients can take to minimize the risk of medical errors during their hospital stay.

The book contains 11 short chapters that focus on key questions that all readers would want answered, such as how to select the appropriate hospital when surgery must be performed, how to go about choosing the surgeon, which documents are needed, and how to get the most benefit from the hospital stay.

The authors include more than 100 tips for maximizing the hospital experience. For example, readers are advised to avoid having elective surgery in July (because that is when medical students and interns start), to inform the surgeon and anesthesiologist about any and all drugs or herbal supplements that they are currently taking, and to make sure that they have a patient advocate while they are in the hospital. The authors also explain what to do when a child must be hospitalized.

The chapters also address other pertinent topics, such as anesthesia, the pre-surgery interview, insurance matters, advance directives, and what to pack for a hospital stay. One chapter is devoted to care in the emergency department, and another gives practical details on what to do after leaving the hospital.

Five appendixes cover emergency contact cards, common outpatient (same-day) procedures, hospital jargon, Internet resources, and a glossary. A nine-page index follows.

Who should read this book? I recommend this book for everyone, especially people who are undergoing their first operation in a hospital. Being aware of the services offered or not offered in the hospital and learning ways to reduce anxiety can be invaluable throughout one’s hospital stay. For health care providers, the Hospital Survival Guide offers excellent insight into many of the uncertainties that patients face as they enter into the unknown world of the hospital.

Even though we hear the alarming statistics every day, the book is a powerful reminder of all of the mistakes that can be made in the course of care and what we all can do to reduce the likelihood of experiencing a medical error ourselves.

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