

JoAnn's Journey Guide to Patient Rights – joannsjourney.org



Know Your Rights: A Patient's Guide to Federal Hospital Protections

When you or someone you love is hospitalized—especially during a critical event like a stroke or brain aneurysm—understanding your patient rights is essential. Federal laws protect your safety, dignity, and ability to make informed medical decisions. This guide breaks down your key rights and provides trusted resources to help you get support when it matters most.

Federal Patient Rights Checklist

1. The Right to Emergency Care (EMTALA)

- You cannot be denied emergency treatment, regardless of insurance status or ability to pay.
- Hospitals are legally required to provide a medical screening exam if you go to the emergency room.
- If you have a serious condition (like a stroke or ruptured aneurysm), you must be stabilized or transferred appropriately.

Learn more: [EMTALA Law – CMS Overview](#)

2. The Right to Informed Decisions (CMS & Patient Self-Determination Act)

- You have the right to be informed about your diagnosis, care options, and risks in plain language.
- You can accept or refuse treatment and have the right to a second opinion.
- You have the right to create or submit an advance directive or name a healthcare proxy.

Details: [Patient Self-Determination Act – AHA Info](#)

3. The Right to a Patient Advocate

- You can request a patient advocate at any hospital to help you understand care decisions, resolve concerns, and speak on your behalf.
- Advocates can assist with billing issues, medical disputes, emotional support, or care planning.

Find help: [Patient Advocate Foundation](#)

4. The Right to Privacy and Access to Records (HIPAA)

- Your health information must be kept private and secure.
- You have the right to review and request a copy of your medical records.
- You may ask for corrections to inaccurate information.

More info: [HIPAA Rights – HHS.gov](#)

5. The Right to File a Complaint or Grievance

- You can file complaints about your care or hospital experience with the hospital's Patient Relations department, or directly with state or federal regulators.
- You are protected from retaliation for speaking up.
Submit a complaint:
- CMS Complaint Process
- The Joint Commission Complaint Portal
- [State Health Department Directory – CDC](#)

6. The Right to Respectful, Dignified Care

- You have the right to be treated with compassion, cultural sensitivity, and respect for your personal values.
- Your pain and preferences must be acknowledged and documented.
- You may request access to spiritual care, interpreters, and family-inclusive care planning.
Learn more: The Joint Commission – Patient Rights

Who to Contact for Help and Support

- [Patient Advocate Foundation](#) – Free one-on-one case management for patients in crisis
- American Stroke Association – Learn stroke signs, treatment options, and recovery support
- [Brain Aneurysm Foundation](#) – Information, survivor stories, and support resources for aneurysm patients
- CMS – Medicare Rights & Complaints – Government resource for hospital and Medicare patient rights
- [State Health Department Directory \(CDC\)](#) – Find your state's health department
- The Joint Commission – File a Complaint

Pro Tip

Ask for your hospital's "Patient Bill of Rights" upon admission or from your nurse. Hospitals are required to provide this information by law, and it outlines your full list of patient protections and support contacts.

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