10 Questions to Ask Before Leaving the Hospital

A PlainSpeak Health checklist | Arn Facklam, NP, FHM

I've discharged thousands of patients, and I can tell you this: the most dangerous part of a hospital stay is often the trip home. Not because anything went wrong - but because the right questions never got asked. Print this page, take it with you, and check each one off before you leave.

- ☐ **1. What exactly changed about my medications - and what do I stop taking?**
  Why it matters: Hospitals routinely swap your home meds for their own equivalents. Going home on BOTH the old and new version is one of the most common - and most dangerous - discharge mistakes.

- ☐ **2. What warning signs mean “come back to the ER” versus “call your doctor Monday”?**
  Why it matters: Every discharge should come with a red-flag list. Knowing the difference keeps you from panicking over normal recovery - or ignoring something urgent.

- ☐ **3. Who do I call - name and direct number - if something feels wrong tonight?**
  Why it matters: “Call your doctor” is useless at 9pm on a Saturday. Get a specific name, a number, and what to do if no one answers.

- ☐ **4. Which follow-up appointments do I need - and can we book them before I leave?**
  Why it matters: Appointments booked at discharge actually happen. “Call next week to schedule” often doesn’t.

- ☐ **5. Are any test results still pending? How and when will I get them?**
  Why it matters: Biopsies, cultures, and scans often come back after you leave. Make sure they don’t fall into a black hole.

- ☐ **6. What am I NOT allowed to do for the next two weeks?**
  Why it matters: Driving, lifting, stairs, work - ask directly. Vague “take it easy” instructions get interpreted five different ways.

- ☐ **7. What should I eat, drink, or avoid while I recover?**
  Why it matters: New diagnoses and new medications often come with diet rules nobody mentions until there’s a problem.

- ☐ **8. Who is in charge of my care now?**
  Why it matters: Your regular doctor? A specialist? Someone new? After discharge it’s shockingly common for no one to feel responsible. Name the quarterback before you leave.

- ☐ **9. Can you explain my diagnosis back to me in one plain-English paragraph?**
  Why it matters: If you can’t repeat it simply, you don’t understand it yet - and the moment to fix that is now, while the team is still standing in front of you.

- ☐ **10. Can I get everything we just discussed in writing before I walk out?**
  Why it matters: You’ll remember about 20% of what’s said at discharge. Paper remembers 100%.

This checklist is general information for patients and families - not medical advice for any individual. Always follow the guidance of your own care team.

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