Sick and a senior?

What to expect when going into the hospital

by Sherri Auger

Growing up I always believed that a trip to the hospital meant that I would not only be cured of what ailed me but that my personal comfort, as well as my health, would be catered to. From my own experience with aging family members and that of the seniors that I work with, I know that this is not necessarily the case. Increases in the number of people using the system combined with the frailty of the people entering our hospitals, has led to minimum care being provided to each patient. If you are elderly or have an aging relative here are three things you need to know.

- Personal care for an aging relative falls to the family. For example, most hospital staff will not shave patients meaning the family or privately sourced care givers are required to do this.
- It falls to the family to monitor many of the basic functions such as eating and mood changes in their aging relatives.
- Hospitals are not staffed adequately to assist patients to and from the bathroom meaning many seniors, unsteady on their feet or weak from illness, are placed in incontinent products to minimize risks of falling.

Should your loved one be deemed as unable to care for themselves and live independently, after they leave the hospital, long term care may be recommended by hospital staff. As a family member, caring for an aging parent or relative, here are three things you need to know.

- Your loved one must be considered "bed ready" meaning ready for discharge from the hospital, prior to any applications being submitted for long term care.

- Many hospital policies have been changed and now require that a family select a bed in a long term care facility, which has availability, as one of their facility choices even if they do not really want to go there.
- Many hospitals are opting to charge patients who stay in their beds longer then the hospital deems warranted. This cost can range from $50 per day up to $700 per day.

So what can you do?

- Ensure that aging relatives have a family member or advocate with them when they go to the hospital and ensure that this person is authorized to speak with medical staff re: care options.
- Bring Powers of Attorney for Care to the hospital and add names to the hospital contact list that you want authorized to inquire about your care and make care choices should you be incapacitated.
- Don't accept a bed at a long term care facility where you do not want to live. It is difficult to get moved once you are placed.
- Look for a respite bed at a facility where you may want to stay versus a permanent placement.
- Select an interim placement at a retirement home which provides a high level of assisted living.

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In Ontario, three main types of residential settings provide both accommodation and care for seniors: Supportive Housing, Retirement Homes, Long-Term Care Homes.

Each setting offers different types of accommodations and varying levels of service. Assess your personal situation and compare your needs with the amenities and services offered by each setting.

Consider Supportive Housing

If you don't need immediate or 24-hour availability of nursing care or specialized health services, but if you are looking for:

- Your own apartment near other people who have similar lifestyles and/or social interests
- Rental housing with possible government rent-geared-to-income subsidy
- Government-funded personal care services
- 24-hour availability of personal care and support
- Other optional services (e.g. meals or social activities)

Consider Retirement Homes

If you don't need government subsidized rent or care and/or 24-hour availability of nursing care or specialized health services, but if you are looking for:

- Your own room or apartment near other people who have similar lifestyles and social interests
- Wheelchair-accessible rental accommodations
- Other optional services (e.g. meals or social activities)
- A setting that can adapt to changes in your personal care needs

Consider Long-Term Care Homes

If you don't need 24-hour hospital care, but if you are looking for:

- 24-hour availability of nursing care and high levels of personal care
- A setting that can accommodate varying health needs with on-site supervision for your personal safety
- Government-funded nursing and personal care
- Possibility of subsidized accommodations