PARTNERS IN QUALITY: TAKING AN ACTIVE ROLE IN YOUR HEALTH CARE
Partners in Quality:
Hospitals and health systems are working to create a health care system that focuses on you and your community. By creating a system that keeps you healthy, in addition to caring for you when you’re sick, we are strengthening the communities in which Pennsylvanians live and work. A key to this is you.

With access to more health care information than ever before, consumers like yourself are becoming more involved in their care. However, being wise about health care is more than just having information. It also means becoming an active partner in your care.

We are striving for clinical quality and are working to create an environment where you are an important part of the care you receive. To assist you in taking a more active role in your health care, we have developed this guide to becoming our partner in quality. Not only can this guide help you if you are a patient, it identifies important steps if a family member or friend is a patient.
Partners in Quality:
Partnering During the Admissions Process

When you go to the hospital, you may meet with an admissions representative who will ask you for information as well as share information about the hospital. To be an active participant, as well as to make the process go as smooth as possible, you may want to:

❖ **Consider bringing a family member, friend, or caregiver** – You may find it helpful to bring a family member, friend, or caregiver with you during your admission. In addition to making you feel more comfortable, they may be able to remind you of any questions you may have had, as well as remember any instructions you may receive. If you have a caregiver, he/she may be interested in learning about additional sources of information, support, or community services.

❖ **Be prepared to share your medical history** – Your medical history may have been forwarded to the hospital prior to your admission. However, there are times when you may be asked questions about your medical history. Be prepared to share information about your illnesses or operations, medical conditions that run in your family, and other doctors you see. You also may be asked to bring along test results or x-rays.

❖ **Bring a list of all medications** – Many people take several medications, both prescription and over-the-counter types. Because it is possible for these medicines to interact, bring a list of all medicines — as well as vitamins and minerals and herbal supplements — you take, the amount of each dose, the time you take each dose, and any side effects or reactions you’ve had.

In addition, please leave your “valuables” (such as jewelry and cash) at home. Hospitals and health systems are not equipped to provide the proper protection necessary to safeguard your valuables.
❖ Ask questions about your hospital stay –
If you have questions about your hospital stay, make a list of them before you are admitted. Bring the list with you and discuss your questions with the admissions representative. Make sure that you understand the information you receive. If your primary language is not English, let the admissions representative know. If you have difficulty hearing, or need the representative to speak more slowly, just let him/her know. It’s important that you have your questions answered to your satisfaction.

❖ Discuss your preferences in advance – An “advance directive” is a document that allows you to state your preferences about care if you should ever become too seriously ill to make your wishes known. Examples include living wills and durable health care powers of attorney. If you have such documents, you should bring them with you. If you don’t have these documents and are interested in having them created, let your admissions representative know.

❖ Be prepared to discuss your insurance status – During the admissions process, you will be asked questions about your current insurance. Please bring along any necessary insurance information, such as enrollment cards.
Partners in Quality:
Partnering During Your Hospital Stay

Research studies show that you can benefit most from treatment when you understand what is happening and are involved in making decisions. During your hospital stay you can continue to take an active role in your care by:

❖ **Talking with members of your health care team** –
Your health care team includes a number of health care professionals, including doctors, nurses, case managers, therapists, pharmacists, technicians, and others. Every person in your health care team plays an active role in your care. Feel free to ask them questions about your care as well as express your values and preferences. All members of your health care team wear name badges that identify who they are and their job title.

❖ **Describing symptoms and/or pain clearly** –
A physical evaluation and medical tests provide valuable information about your condition, but it is your description of symptoms that help to point the doctor in the right direction. When asked about your symptoms, try to identify when your symptoms started, what time of day they happen, how long they last, how often they occur, and if they are getting better or worse. This level of detail helps your doctor identify the problem.

❖ **Understanding your condition** – An important part of partnering with your health care provider is understanding your medical condition. Hospitals often have videos, classes, literature, information from national health organizations, or Internet access to help you learn more about many medical conditions. If you don’t understand your condition, medical tests, or treatment, discuss them with your health care provider. Feel free to ask what may have caused the condition, how long it will last, and how to get more information. If you don’t understand a medical test, such as blood test or
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x-ray, ask your health care provider to explain why it is important and ask the doctor to explain the results and what they mean. If you don’t understand other aspects of your care, feel free to ask what the specific treatment will or will not do, how long it should last, as well as any alternatives. Take notes and ask questions throughout your stay.

❖ Understanding your medications – Once in the hospital, you may begin taking medications that are different from those you were taking prior to admission. It’s important to understand what medications you are taking, what they look like, in what dosage, at what times, why you are taking them, as well as potential side effects. As an active participant in your care, be alert to any changes in your medication routine and feel free to ask questions.

❖ Identifying yourself – While in the hospital, you may be in many departments of the hospital and seen by many different people. As a partner in your health care, you should identify who you are and why you’re there. When undergoing a particular procedure (such as surgery or an x-ray), feel comfortable assisting in identifying a procedure’s site.

❖ Understanding the direction of your care – The care you receive while in the hospital is planned. In addition, your health care team may develop “clinical pathways,” which outline what the team expects to happen during each day of your stay. Consider asking a member of your health care team if they have a clinical pathway for you. If they do, ask them to review it with you to help you understand what will be happening to you during your stay. Many times your care may differ from the pathway, but understanding this plan can help you participate in your care and anticipate questions about it. Feel free to ask as many questions as necessary to understand the direction of your care.
Partners in Quality:
Partnering When You’re Preparing to Leave the Hospital

When you are preparing to leave the hospital, either you, a family member, friend, caregiver, or member of your health care team, will work with your hospital case manager or discharge planners to coordinate your discharge plan, including medications, restrictions, or follow-up care. To be an active participant, try to:

❖ **Understand discharge medication orders** – Once you leave the hospital, you may be taking one or more new medications. They may be different from what you were taking prior to admission, as well as from those you were taking while in the hospital. It’s important to understand what medications you should now take, in what dosage, at what times, for what reason, as well as potential side effects. In addition, because the medications may be different from what you were taking prior to admission, discard the old medications to reduce your risk of taking the wrong one.

❖ **Understand any instructions you’re given** – When you are preparing to leave the hospital, you will be given a list of instructions to follow. They may include items such as diet, exercise, changes to school or work, changing of dressings, and follow-up visits. Following these instructions is important. Make sure the information you receive is understandable to you. If your primary language
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is other than English, let the case manager or discharge planner know. If you have difficulty hearing, or need the representative to speak more slowly, just let him/her know. You may find it helpful to have a family member, friend, or caregiver with you during this process.

❖ **Share any special needs** – The hospital’s case managers or discharge planners are able to assist you in receiving any follow-up care or special equipment you may need. Feel comfortable discussing any special needs as well as any concerns you may have.

Once your stay at the hospital is completed, you will receive a statement of costs incurred while at the hospital. Hospitals provide patient billing representatives to discuss your statement. If you have any questions, feel free to contact the billing representative to discuss your questions. Billing representatives also can help you find answers to questions you may have about your insurance.

At some point after your hospital stay, you may be asked to complete a patient satisfaction survey about your hospital stay. It’s important that you complete the survey and provide honest feedback about your hospital experience. Helping to identify what areas could be improved upon is still another way you can become active in your health care.

**Our Partnership Will Benefit Everyone!**

In many ways, hospitals and health systems have become complex organizations due to significant advances in technology. Rest assured that our primary goal and commitment remains simple — to provide high-quality care to help you achieve your best possible health. We can best meet that goal with you as our partner.
The Hospital & Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania is an affiliate of The Health Alliance of Pennsylvania and a strategic partner of:

- PHICO Group, Inc.
- The Institute for Healthy Communities
- The Health Alliance Charitable Foundation
- AllHealth

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