CENTERS FOR MEDICARE & MEDICAID SERVICES

Guide to Choosing a Hospital

This official government booklet explains the following:

- Steps to find and compare hospitals
- Why hospital quality is important
- Information about Medicare and hospital stays

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES · USA

How this booklet can help you

Most people check restaurant ratings or read consumer reviews before they make a choice. Shouldn't you also check the quality of the hospitals you rely on when you need medical care?

In an emergency, your life may depend on getting to the nearest hospital. When you can plan ahead, you and your doctor should discuss which hospital will best meet your health care needs. Information is available to help you make an informed choice. Whether you have Medicare or another type of insurance, this booklet can help you find and use information about hospital quality.

You need a computer and internet access to use some of the resources in this booklet. If you don't have a computer, your local library, senior center, a family member, or friend may be able to help you. You can also call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227). TTY users should call 1-877-486-2048.

"Choosing a Hospital" isn't a legal document. Official Medicare Program legal guidance is contained in the relevant laws, regulations, and rulings.

The information in this booklet was correct at the time of printing. Call 1-800-MEDICARE or visit www.medicare.gov to get the most current information.

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SECTION

1

Steps to Choosing a Hospital

When you're sick, you may go to the closest hospital or the hospital where your doctor practices. But which hospital is the best for your individual needs? Research now shows that some hospitals do a better job taking care of patients with certain conditions than other hospitals.

When you have a life-threatening emergency, always go to the nearest hospital. However, if you're planning to have surgery, or if you have a condition like heart disease and know you may need hospital care in the future, use the steps on pages 7–10 to learn about your hospital choices. Understanding your choices will help you have a more informed discussion with your doctor or other health care provider.

It really helps when I take time to write down my questions before my doctor's appointment.

Before you get started

Make the most of your appointments with your doctor or other health care provider to learn about your condition and health care needs:

- Before your appointment, make a list of things you want to talk about (such as recent symptoms, drug side effects, or other general health questions). Bring this list to your appointment.
- Bring any prescription drugs, over-the-counter drugs, vitamins, and supplements to your appointment and review them with your doctor or provider.
- During your appointment, take notes. Then, take a moment to repeat back to the doctor or provider what you were told. Ask any questions you may have.
- Consider bringing along a trusted family member or friend.
- Ask if there's any written information about your condition that you can take with you.
- Call the office if you have questions when you get home.

Steps to Choosing a Hospital Checklist

	STEP 1: Learn about the care you need and your hospital choices.
✓	**Talk to your doctor/health care provider about the following:**
	Find out which hospitals they work with.
	Ask which hospitals they think give the best care for your condition (for example, have enough staffing, coordinate care, promote medication safety, and prevent infection).
	Ask how well these hospitals check and improve their quality of care.
	Ask if the hospitals participate in Medicare. See page 16.
✓	**Based on your condition, ask your doctor/health care provider questions such as:**
	Which hospitals have the best experience with your condition?
	Should you consider a specialty hospital, teaching hospital (usually part of a university), community hospital, or one that does research or has clinical trials related to your condition?
	If you need a surgeon or other type of specialist, what is his or her experience and success treating your condition?
	Who will be responsible for your overall care while you're in the hospital?
	Will you need care after leaving the hospital and, if so, what kind of care? Who will arrange this care?
	Are there any alternatives to hospital care?

Steps to Choosing a Hospital Checklist

	STEP 2: Think about your personal and financial needs.
✓	**Check your hospital insurance coverage:**
	Do you need permission from your health plan (like a pre-authorization or a referral) before you're admitted for hospital care?
	If you need care that's not emergency care, do you have to use certain hospitals? Do you have to see certain surgeons or specialists?
	Do you have to pay more to use a hospital (surgeon or specialist) that doesn't participate in your plan?
	Do you need to meet certain requirements to get care after you leave the hospital?
	If you don't have insurance, call the hospital before you're admitted, and ask to speak to someone about setting up a payment plan or other resources to help with payment.
✓	**Think about your preferences:**
	Do you want a hospital near family members or friends?
	Does the hospital have convenient visiting hours and other rules that are important to you? For example, can a relative or someone helping with your care stay overnight in the room with you?

Steps to Choosing a Hospital Checklist

STEP 3: Find and compare hospitals based on your condition and needs.	
	Use the **Hospital Compare** Web tool at www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov to do the following and more: • Find hospitals by name, city, county, state, or ZIP code. • Check the results of patient surveys (what patients said about their hospital experiences). • Compare the results of certain measures of quality that show how well these hospitals treat certain conditions. **See Section 2** for a closer look at hospital quality and the Hospital Compare Web tool. You can also call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227). TTY users should call 1-877-486-2048.
	Search online for other sources to compare the quality of the hospitals you're considering. Some states have laws that require hospitals to report data about the quality and cost of their care and post the data online.
STEP 4: Discuss your hospital options, and choose a hospital.	
	Talk with family members or friends about the hospitals you're comparing.
	Talk to your doctor or health care provider how the hospital information you gathered applies to you.
	Choose the hospital that's best for you.

Hospital Quality Quick Check

Here's a quick summary of what to look for when comparing hospitals:

✓	**Look for a Hospital that:**
	Has the best experience with your condition.
	Checks and improves the quality of its care.
	Performs well on measures of quality, including a national patient survey, that are published on the Hospital Compare Web tool. Visit www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov.
	Participates in Medicare.
	Meets your needs in terms of location and other factors, like visiting hours.
	Is covered by your health plan.

SECTION 2

A Closer Look At Hospital Quality

What is quality hospital care?

Hospitals provide quality care when they give their patients the care and treatments known to get the best results for their condition. Getting quality hospital care may help with your recovery and help you avoid other problems. Not all hospitals provide the same quality of care.

Most hospitals have programs to check and improve the quality of the care they provide. They may collect and monitor information from patient charts to see where they can improve patient care. They may send their patients surveys to ask about their hospital experience. Many hospitals report the information they collect to their state and to Medicare.

Medicare, the states, and other hospital industry leaders review this information and help hospitals take steps to improve quality. Some of the information about hospital quality is published online. See pages 15–16 for a list of other organizations that work to improve hospital quality.

How can I find information about hospital quality?

Medicare publishes information about hospital quality on the **Hospital Compare** Web tool. Visit www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov. Hospital Compare gives you a "snapshot" of how well hospitals in your area, and around the nation, care for patients with certain conditions. Use this information when you talk to your doctor about which hospital is best for you.

Joe lives in Philadelphia and needs to have knee replacement surgery. He wants to have it in Atlanta where his son lives. Joe and his wife are comparing hospitals in Atlanta on Hospital Compare.

How does the Hospital Compare Web tool work?

When you visit Hospital Compare, finding information about the quality of hospitals is just a few steps away:

- Click on "Find and Compare Hospitals," and decide if you want to look for hospitals by the hospital name, or by ZIP Code, City, State or Territory, or County.
- Select General Search, Medical Condition Search, or Surgical Procedure Search.
- Select the hospitals you want to compare.

What kind of information is on Hospital Compare?

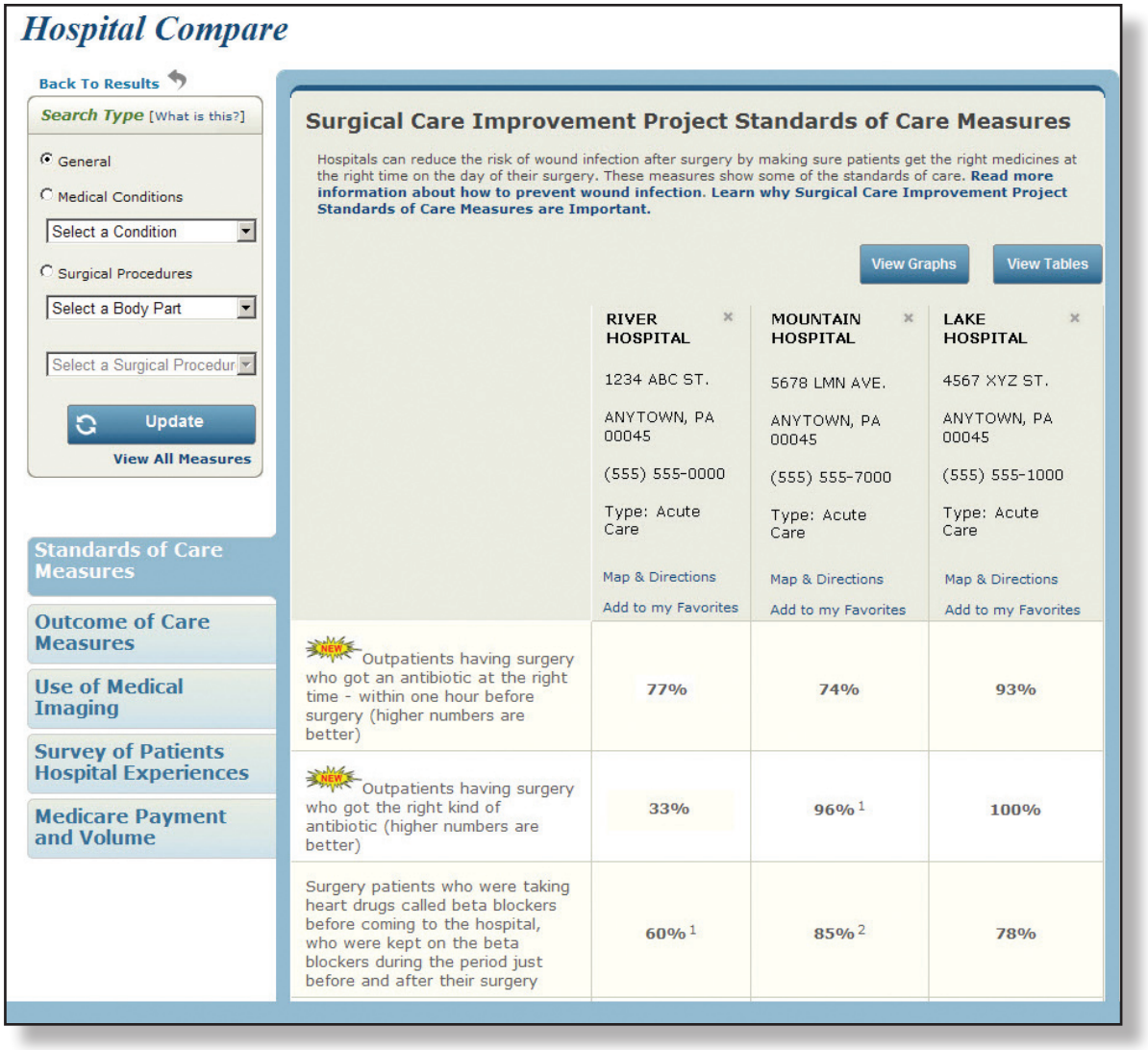
You can compare hospitals based on the following:

- How recently-discharged patients responded to a national survey about their hospital experiences. For example, how well their hospital's doctors and nurses communicate with patients, and how well they manage their patients' pain.
- How often hospitals give recommended treatments for certain common conditions like heart attack, heart failure, pneumonia, children's asthma, and surgery.
- How hospitals' rates of readmission and 30-day mortality (death) rates for certain conditions compare with the national rate.
- How each hospital uses outpatient medical imaging tests (like CT scans and MRIs).
- How many people with Medicare have had certain procedures or have been treated for certain conditions at that hospital.
- What Medicare pays a hospital (on average) when the hospital performs certain procedures or treats certain conditions.

If you're in a Medicare Advantage plan or other health plan, Hospital Compare doesn't have information about whether your care will be covered in a certain hospital. Check with your plan.

The information on Hospital Compare is updated regularly. Check Hospital Compare often for the most up-to-date results and new information.

Here's an example of what you'll see on Hospital Compare:



What other organizations work to improve hospital quality?

- Quality Improvement Organizations are a group of practicing doctors and other health care experts paid by the Federal government to check and improve the care given to people with Medicare. To get your QIO's phone number, visit www.medicare.gov, and select "Help & Support." You can also call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227). TTY users should call 1-877-486-2048.
- The Hospital Quality Alliance (HQA) consists of organizations that represent consumers, hospitals, doctors, nurses, employers, accrediting organizations, and Federal agencies. The HQA seeks to improve the quality of hospital care by reporting information about hospital quality to the public. For a list of HQA members, visit www.hospitalqualityalliance.org.
- Some states also post information about the quality of their hospitals.
- Accrediting organizations also have information about hospital quality. See "About Hospital Evaluations" on the next page.

About Hospital Evaluations

To participate in Medicare, hospitals must comply with Medicare health and safety regulations. A hospital's compliance with those regulations may be evaluated (surveyed) by your State Survey Agency or by a national accreditation organization whose hospital accreditation program has been approved by Medicare. Hospitals may choose either method of evaluation. You can check with a hospital you're considering to see if it's evaluated by a State Survey Agency or by one of the national accreditation programs.

Currently Medicare has approved three national accrediting organizations (listed below) to check the quality of care in hospitals. If a hospital you're considering is accredited by one of these organizations, you can call, write, or go online to find out if there's information that the organization can share with you about the hospital's performance. You can also call the applicable organization if you have a complaint about a hospital.

- The Joint Commission
  1 Renaissance Boulevard
  Oakbrook Terrace, IL 60181-4294
  1-630-792-5800
  www.jointcommission.org

- American Osteopathic Association
  142 East Ontario Street
  Chicago, IL 60611
  1-800-621-1773
  1-312-202-8000
  www.osteopathic.org

- Det Norsk Veritas Health Care (DNVHC)
  463 Ohio Pike, Suite 203
  Cincinnati, OH 45255
  1-866-523-6842
  www.dnvaccreditation.com/pr/dnv/default.aspx

About Hospital Evaluations (continued)

You can also call or write to your state for copies of any survey reports or any other quality information they may have on your hospital. States also handle complaints about hospitals. State contact information is available by visiting www.cms.hhs.gov/SurveyCertificationGeninfo/Downloads/State_Agency_Contacts.pdf.

What can I do to improve the quality of the hospitals in my area?

- Talk to the staff about the care you're getting. Ask questions if something doesn't seem right to you.
- Become a hospital volunteer.
- Become an advocate for better care by writing a letter to, or talking with, hospital leaders about ways to improve the care they provide.
- Serve on a hospital board or committee.
- Keep learning about the quality of the hospitals in your area.

Notes

Use this page to write down important notes.

SECTION 3

Medicare and Your Hospital Stay

How can I find information about Medicare coverage of hospital services?

Original Medicare helps cover certain medical services and supplies in hospitals. If you have both Medicare Part A (Hospital Insurance) and Medicare Part B (Medical Insurance), you can get the full range of Medicare-covered services in a hospital.

NOTE: If you're in a Medicare Advantage Plan (like an HMO or PPO) or other Medicare health plan, read your plan materials. These plans provide all your Part A and Part B coverage.

For more information about Medicare-covered hospital services, look at your "Medicare & You" handbook that's delivered in the fall of each year to all people with Medicare. View it online by visiting http://go.usa.gov/iDJ. You can also call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227) with your questions. TTY users should call 1-877-486-2048.

Are You An Inpatient or an Outpatient?

Did you know that even if you stay in the hospital overnight, you might still be considered an outpatient? Your hospital status (whether you're an inpatient or an outpatient) affects how much you pay for hospital services (like X-rays, drugs, and lab tests). You also need to have a 3-day **inpatient** hospital stay for Medicare to cover care you get in a skilled nursing facility. If you're in the hospital more than a few hours, always ask your doctor or the hospital staff if you're an inpatient or an outpatient.

Learn more about the differences between inpatient and outpatient services by viewing the booklet, "Are You a Hospital Inpatient or Outpatient? If you have Medicare – Ask!" Visit http://go.usa.gov/im9 or call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227). TTY users should call 1-877-486-2048.

For more Medicare resources, including how Medicare covers care in a skilled nursing facility.

What are my rights in the hospital as a person with Medicare?

No matter which hospital you choose, as a person with Medicare, you have certain rights and protections while you're in the hospital. For example, you have the right to be included in decisions about your care and the right to appeal certain decisions about your coverage. For more information about these rights, you can view or print the booklet, "Your Medicare Rights and Protections" by visiting http://go.usa.gov/iDS, or by calling 1-800-MEDICARE. If you feel you're being asked to leave the hospital too soon, you have the right to request a review of that decision. This is explained in the notice called "An Important Message from Medicare About Your Rights." The hospital should give you a copy of this notice. If you don't get a copy, ask your nurse or the hospital's patient advocate to get you one.

Who can help me if I have a complaint about my hospital care?

If you have a complaint about the **quality of the care** you, a family member, or someone you care for received at a hospital, contact your state's Quality Improvement Organization (QIO). To get your QIO's phone number, visit www.medicare.gov, and select "Help & Support." You can also call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227). TTY users should call 1-877-486-2048

If you have **other complaints** about a hospital, contact your State Survey Agency. For their number, visit www.medicare.gov, and select "Help & Support." You can also call 1-800-MEDICARE.

Medicare Resources

Medicare offers free booklets about Medicare-related topics to help you make informed health care decisions. To read, print, or download copies of booklets, brochures, or fact sheets, go to www.medicare.gov, select "Resource Locator," and then "Publications." You can also call 1-800-MEDICARE to find out if a printed copy can be mailed to you.

Here are some Medicare publications you might find helpful:

- The "Medicare & You" handbook – A comprehensive look at Medicare coverage. It's delivered in the fall of each year to all people with Medicare.
- "Your Discharge Planning Checklist" – A checklist you use in the hospital to make sure you have all the information you need before you leave. Print the checklist, and take it with you. You can also ask a family member to print it for you, if you can't plan ahead.
- "Guide to Choosing a Nursing Home" – How to find and compare nursing homes.
- "Medicare Coverage of Skilled Nursing Facility Care"
- "Medicare and Home Health Care"

Medicare Resources (continued)

- "Medicare Hospice Benefits"
- Quick guides to Medicare coverage:
  - "Medicare and Your Hospital Benefits: Getting Started"
  - "Medicare and Hospice Benefits: Getting Started"
  - "Medicare's Home Health Benefit: Getting Started"
  - "Medicare and Skilled Nursing Facility Care Benefits: Getting Started"

Compare the Quality of Plans and Providers

Compare the quality of care and services given by health and prescription drug plans, or health care providers nationwide by visiting www.medicare.gov, and selecting "Resource Locator." Then select one of the following:

- "Health Plans"
- "Drug Plans"
- "Dialysis Facilities"
- "Home Health Agencies"
- "Nursing Homes"
- "Hospitals"

Find a Doctor or Other Healthcare Professional

Visit www.medicare.gov/physician to find doctors and other healthcare professionals in your area.

MyMedicare.gov

Medicare's secure online service for accessing your personal Medicare information

Register at www.MyMedicare.gov to do the following:

- Create and print an "On the Go" report that lists information you can share with your providers.
- Add or modify self-reported health management information such as medical conditions and allergies.
- View or modify your personal drug list and pharmacy information, and see your prescription drug costs.
- Search for and create a list of your favorite providers, and access quality information about them.
- Track your Original Medicare claims, and order a Medicare Summary Notice.
- Track the preventive services you can get.
- Find a Medicare health or prescription drug plan.
- Access online forms, publications, and messages sent by Medicare.
- Sign up to get your "Medicare & You" handbook electronically.

Notes

Use this page to write down important notes.

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