



WHO'S WHO IN THE HOSPITAL

By Cheryl Sobun

If you have to stay in the hospital, you will meet many different kinds of health care professionals. Some will be doctors and nurses. Some will work on the business and financial side. It may be hard to figure out who's who. Some hospitals use colored uniforms to help you tell the difference. But you may not know what these staff members do because titles can change from hospital to hospital. For example, an anesthesiologist also may be called an anesthesia care provider. Most hospitals do require staff members to wear name tags with job titles. And guests often must wear a visitor's badge. This is for your safety. If someone without a badge enters your room, press your call button. A nurse will come and help you. The following will show you the types of people who work at hospitals and a little about what they do.

Financial Professionals

Registrars—Whenever you check into the hospital, your first stop is the registration desk. Here you meet the registrar. The registrar enters your information into the computer. This includes your name, address, phone number, and Social Security number. It may also include your employer, work address, work phone, and insurance information. You may be asked to fill out some forms. Remember to bring your insurance card and driver's license. The registrar may need to make copies of them. Also bring your checkbook or credit card in case you need to make a payment.

Patient financial counselors—Some hospitals have financial counselors. They are there to help you figure out how to pay your hospital bill. They can help you set up a payment plan. Or they can look into Medicaid or other programs if you cannot pay your bill or do not have insurance.

Patient account representatives—You may never meet your patient account representative. You probably will talk by phone or through the mail. This is the person who bills your insurance company and collects your part of the bill. You will receive two different bills for hospital charges and doctor's charges. There are phone numbers on them should you have any questions.

Health Care Professionals

Many different health care professionals will visit your room while you are in the hospital. Some are doctors and nurses. Some are technicians who do tests. Some may come just to take your temperature. Not everyone is medically qualified to answer your questions. The following will help you understand who is caring for you and who is qualified to do what.

Certified nurse assistants (CNAs) or nurse's aides—These are assistants approved by the state to help registered nurses (RNs). CNAs cannot answer your medical questions, but can pass them on to an RN. This usually is the first person you see in the morning. The CNA takes your temperature and blood pressure, helps you bathe, changes your sheets, and brings you meals.

Registered nurses—RNs take care of you based on your doctor's orders. They watch and record your progress. They give you medicine. They help the doctor treat and examine you. The RN is there to comfort you, answer your medical questions, and handle emergencies. They usually work in one area of the hospital, such as the emergency or maternity department.

Doctors—Your doctor will visit you at least once a day. It depends on your medical condition. Your condition also determines if and when specialists visit you. Specialists are doctors that work in a particular area. Your

doctor may ask them to help with your care.

Physician assistants (PAs) and nurse practitioners (NPs)—PAs and NPs are trained to help doctors. How much they can do varies from state to state. Generally, they can examine you and answer your medical questions. They can order tests and make a diagnosis. They may or may not be able to give orders or prescribe medicine. They may visit you alone or with a doctor.

Technicians—You may see many different kinds of technicians while you are in the hospital. It depends on your condition. It also depends on the tests you need. There are blood lab technicians, radiology technicians, cardiac technicians, and more. Most tests can be done at your bedside. Sometimes you are taken to another department for tests.

Therapists

You may need to see a therapist while you are in the hospital. What kind of therapist you need depends on your condition. You may need an occupational therapist, a physical therapist, or a speech therapist.

Occupational therapists—These therapists help you gain the skills you need to lead a happy, productive life. These skills may have been lost to injury, illness or a disability. Occupational therapists help with:

- arthritis, cancer, or other illnesses
- head or spinal cord injuries
- injuries from work or sports
- an amputated limb
- burns
- head trauma
- a stroke or another neurological condition
- mental illness
- developmental disabilities.

Physical therapists—These therapists work with joints, muscles and heart/lung function. They help you regain strength, flexibility and endurance. Physical therapists help with:

- arthritis
- back injuries
- foot, ankle, or knee injuries
- hand injuries or carpal tunnel syndrome
- hip injuries
- shoulder injuries
- neck pain
- osteoporosis
- scoliosis

Speech therapists—Speech and language therapists help communicate to the best of your ability. These therapists help with communication problems due to:

- stroke
- head injury
- cancer of the mouth and throat
- illnesses such as multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, and motor neuron disease
- physical disability such as cerebral palsy
- hearing problems

Dieticians

Typically, you won't meet your dietician. Your doctor tells the dietician what you can eat and you select your meals from an approved menu. If you have to change your diet long-term or have any special concerns, you can ask to personally meet your dietician. Or your doctor may ask for you.

Other Hospital Staff

Volunteers usually take you to your room when you arrive at the hospital. They make take you to other departments for tests and procedures. Volunteers also deliver flowers and menus. If you need something special to feel at home, volunteers can usually get it for you.. If it is a religious hospital, a chaplain, priest, or rabbi will probably stop by your room. If not, you can ask for one to visit you. They are there to offer prayer and support.