



Mental Health Association of Northern Kentucky

A LEADER IN PROVIDING ADVOCACY, EDUCATION, AND SERVICES THAT PROMOTE MENTAL WELLNESS

EDUCATION AND SCREENING OUTREACH PARTNER FOR THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH AND NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

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DEALING WITH TRANSITIONS

GOING HOME FROM THE HOSPITAL

- **Ask Questions**

Like most people, you probably have a lot of questions. You may want to ask how long you'll be on medication, who you can call if you need help, etc. It's important to have answers to these questions & it's best to ask your doctor.

- **Seek Information**

The more information you have the easier the transition will be. That's why we're giving you these sheets with tips on avoiding relapse as well as some phone numbers you can call for help.

Take It Easy At First

No matter how much you wanted to leave the hospital, you probably have some mixed emotions. Hospital stays are for people who need specialized care & they provide around the clock medical attention. When you leave the hospital, you will need time to adjust to life outside that structured environment.

- **Get Extra Rest**

You may feel very tired during your first few days home. You may need extra sleep and may find that you have little energies for activities. Don't worry, this is normal. Adjusting to a new environment takes time, don't push yourself to do too much too soon. Your doctor or therapist can help you work out a plan for gradually increasing your activity level.

- **Give Yourself Time**

It is important to remember that being in the hospital will not cure you. Mental health problems, like a broken bone, take time & you can't start going at full speed right away. If you put too much stress on yourself you may have to go back to the hospital. On the other hand, if you take things too slow & don't increase your activities over time you may not get any better. Many people find it's helpful to join a partial hospitalization or day program that is run by people who are experts in the recovery process. Such programs can help you maintain a healthy balance between rest & activity.

Get To Know Your Treatment Team

The doctors, nurses, social workers, & other professionals who treated you in the hospital may not be the same ones you see outside the hospital. Meeting & getting to know the members of your treatment team can be stressful. It can help if you write everything down on one sheet & share it with your treatment team. Remember that your success increases when you talk openly & honestly with your treatment team.

Who are the members of my treatment team ?

Different hospitals & doctors offices have different types of professionals. Below is the list of some professional titles you may hear & what they mean.

Case Manager - works directly with clients, coordinates services & helps clients communicate with members of their treatment team.

Counselor / Therapist - a person specially trained to help you deal with stress & manage mental health problems. Typically you see him / her every week or every other week & talk about your feelings, specific problems you're having, etc.

Nurse - a person specially trained to provide services that are essential or helpful in the promotion, maintenance & restoration of health & well-being.

Occupational Therapist - a person trained to provide therapy through creative activity that promotes recovery or rehabilitation.

Pharmacist - person who fills medications prescribed by your doctor(s).

Psychiatric Nurse - a nurse who specializes in the prevention, treatment & rehabilitation of mental health related problems. They offer individual, couples, family & group therapy and can also prescribe medication.

Psychiatrist - a medical doctor who is specifically trained to treat mental health problems. They can evaluate & diagnose all types of mental disorders, prescribe medication & work with psychological problems associated with medical disorders.

Psychologist - a person specially trained to help people deal with stress & manage mental health problems. A psychologist can be a counselor or therapist.

Social Worker - a person specially trained to help people meet their basic needs & improve their lives. They can help you find services, benefits or programs in the community to help you. Social Workers can act as your case manager or counselor / therapist.

FIVE TIPS TO EASE YOUR TRANSITION FROM THE HOSPITAL

1) Identify realistic goals that can be achieved in the near future.

Stress from doing too much too soon can bring on a relapse. Don't push yourself. Instead, set small, achievable goals, such as helping with dinner one night or making your bed every day.

2) Learn to manage & reduce stress.

Everyone handles stress differently. If you or your family member needs suggestions on how best to deal with the stress in your life, ask your psychiatrist or therapist for help. There is a lot of good material available on stress management.

3) Talk to your family members & treatment team.

Good communication is important for everyone, especially when you have new information to absorb & new hurdles to face. This seems obvious, but all too often patients & their families become overwhelmed by stress & forget to communicate effectively with each other & the treatment team. Sometimes it helps to write down your questions or concerns before your appointment. It's important to remember that you have a right to speak up & participate in decisions that affect you.

4) Take your medications as prescribed.

As people move toward greater independence, they often have to learn to manage their own medication. They have to know how & where to get their prescriptions, how to pay for them, & what the various pills look like.

You may be tempted to stop taking your medications when you leave the hospital. You may feel better and want to put the bad times behind you. Don't do this ! Stopping your medications on your own can be very risky. It can greatly increase your chances of having to go back to the hospital. If you are experiencing side effects from your medication make sure to tell your doctor.

5) Stay in touch.

Your doctors are there to help you & they want to see you & hear from you. It is important to stay in touch & communicate with them. The best way to do this is to keep your appointments. Showing up for all your appointments is well worth the effort. It is also very helpful if you keep a calendar & write in your appointments to help you remember them. Also, remember to check your calendar when you schedule appointments so you can see if you have anything else scheduled on the same day.

Avoiding the Return of Symptoms

Know the Early Warning Signs of Relapse

It would be nice if patients could leave the hospital symptom - free but that rarely happens in real life. What you need to focus on is continuing the recovery process at home.

Even though you're going to get out of the hospital, the transition can be stressful, and it is not uncommon to have your symptoms return in the first week or so. The best thing is to be prepared - by knowing what to watch out for & who you can call for help.

Most patients who experience more symptoms (or relapse) have early warning signs. For some people, early warning signs include wanting to be alone, crying more, sleeping too much or not being able to sleep. Since everyone is different, these warning signs may not apply to you. You should talk to your doctor & family or friends to find out what your early warning signs are.

Also, be sure to talk to your doctor, therapist or case worker about what to do if you notice these early warning signs. Planning in advance on how to deal with these signs may help prevent another stay in the hospital.

Think about some of your early warning signs & write them below :

Avoid Drugs & Alcohol

Many people in society drink alcohol & / or use street drugs like marijuana or cocaine. In a time of transition, you may feel the urge to start or resume drinking or getting high. You may even be planning on it, or at least thinking about it. You may have friends who ask you to drink or use drugs ; you may feel lonely and find this a way to be with people, or you may be depressed and just want to get high to feel better.

All these feelings are quite common and easy to understand. However, there are certain facts you need to know and keep in mind. ***People who have mental health problems are very sensitive to the bad effects of drugs and alcohol.*** Even very little use can trigger old symptoms that had gone away or make current symptoms much worse. If you use drugs or alcohol, the chances are good that you'll get into serious trouble, which could result in a return to the hospital.

Talk about Treatment Choices Now

If your symptoms return, a re-evaluation of your condition may be necessary. It is a good idea to talk about the possibility with your doctor when you are well. That way, you can discuss how you want your doctor to handle things if you become ill again. Also, be sure to communicate this information to your treatment team in the community.