



PLANNING FOR JOINT REPLACEMENT SURGERY

Patients May Have More Options than Ever

by Wendy Sulzer

The story is all too familiar: an older adult goes in for knee replacement surgery, and after spending a few nights in the hospital, the patient returns home quite unprepared for life after surgery. Even though the discharge planner set up home health services, including physical therapy and an aide to help with showers, the patient realizes they need more care than what home health provides. And sometimes, before home health even begins, the patient falls in the night and has to take a return trip to the hospital. Or maybe it isn't a fall that sends them back to the hospital, but

an infection, implant failure, or other complication of the surgery.

According to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), over 400,000 seniors had knee or hip replacement surgery in 2014 with a total cost of more than seven billion dollars in hospitalization alone. The biggest problem is that some hospitals have a much higher rate of complications than others. According to CMS, the average cost per surgery can range from \$16,500 to \$33,000, and some facilities have three times the rate of complications.

To address this problem, a new payment model has been introduced in 67 geographic locations nationwide, including Dane County. The goal of this new payment model is to create "a health care system that delivers better care, spends our dollars more wisely, and leads to healthier Americans." This new bundled payment model is called the Comprehensive Care for Joint Replacement.

What does this mean for you or your loved one who might be considering knee, hip, or shoulder surgery? In the

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past, very few people elected to have home care services in addition to the home health services provided by Medicare because home care services, like light housekeeping and assistance with meal preparation or other daily tasks, were an additional, out-of-pocket cost. So if an individual didn't have family members available to help them at home during their recovery, the options were to spend that time in a nursing facility or risk a fall or other injury at home. Starting this year though, hospitals might begin offering home care services as a part of the joint replacement surgery package because home care services have been shown to reduce costly rehospitalizations at a much lower cost than lengthy stays in a rehab facility.

If you or someone you love is planning to have knee, hip, or shoulder replacement surgery, you will want to ask about all your options and create a plan prior to the surgery. Do you feel strongly about going home as soon as possible? A little bit of planning and arranging for some home care services can increase your chances of a successful recovery. And whether home care services are included by your hospital or not, they are a valuable service you may want to consider.

To determine how much help will be needed, it's a good idea to make a list of the tasks the individual is currently doing for him or herself prior to the surgery that will be difficult to complete without help

post surgery. Daily tasks, like getting dressed, preparing a meal, and caring for a pet, can be almost impossible to manage while using crutches or a walker. The first few days after an individual returns home are the most critical because he or she will likely have some pain in addition to being tired, which can make simple tasks, like getting to the bathroom, exhausting and even treacherous.

Examine the home itself; if the bedrooms are upstairs, for instance, you'll want to plan on creating a temporary bedroom on the main floor. You will also want to consider which bathroom will most easily accommodate a shower chair or other equipment. If your laundry is located anywhere but the main level, assistance with that task will be necessary for safety.

Consider, too, how you or your loved one will accomplish weekly tasks, like shopping for groceries, picking up prescriptions, and taking out the garbage. Another factor people often fail to plan for is how they will make it to follow-up appointments as they will likely not be able to drive themselves for quite some time. These daily and weekly tasks are all services that most home care providers can assist with starting on a daily basis and then usually tapering off as the individual progresses through their recovery.

A home care certified nursing assistant can also provide motivation and assist with a daily exercise program that has been written by a physical

therapist, along with giving medication reminders and documenting daily progress. Home care services often include the support of a nurse who will write a personalized plan of care and help solve any problems that might arise.

Orthopedic care requires skill and knowledge on the part of those involved in the follow-up care as some of the techniques and equipment are specialized and common medications utilized in the post-op phase, such as anticoagulants, present unique challenges in terms of potential adverse reactions. Whether you choose to rehab at home or in a nursing facility, you'll want to make sure you are working with a team of qualified professionals you trust.

Thinking about your needs and planning ahead will save you and your loved one a lot of stress later on and make sure you have the best chance of a quick recovery.

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Photograph submitted by Wendy Sulzer