

What kind of doctor is a hospitalist?

What to expect if
your primary care
doctor refers you
to a hospitalist.

An explanation for
people with Medicare



This booklet is meant to answer some questions you may have about hospitalists.

This booklet explains:

- The differences between your primary care doctor (the doctor you usually see for your general health care) and a hospitalist.
- What to expect if your primary care doctor refers you to a hospitalist.
- How to learn about your options.

What kind of a doctor is a hospitalist?

A hospitalist is a doctor who specializes in the care of patients who are in the hospital. For older patients, a hospitalist will most often be an internal medicine doctor or a family doctor. A hospitalist might be a specialist in pulmonary (lung), cardiology (heart), or other diseases. Hospitalists focus on caring for health conditions that are usually treated in a hospital. Hospitalists usually don't have a practice outside the hospital. Their offices are generally in the hospital.

The best example of a doctor who has a role like a hospitalist is the emergency room (ER) doctor. The ER doctor takes over for your primary care doctor when you go to the ER, cares for you during your stay in the ER, then turns your care back over to your primary care doctor when you leave the ER. A hospitalist has a similar role when you are in the hospital.

Why might my primary care doctor refer me to a hospitalist?

Your primary care doctor may refer you to a hospitalist if:

- Your doctor has decided that a hospitalist's care is needed for your health conditions or illness.
- He or she has decided to focus on office-based care.
- His or her office is far from the hospital.
- He or she has patients at other hospitals making it hard to visit all of them.
- Your doctor has agreed with the hospital or your Medicare health plan* (like an HMO), to have hospitalists give hospital care to his or her patients.

*Medicare managed care and Private-Fee-for-Service plans that offer or require members to use hospitalists must explain this in their plan materials.

What should I expect if my primary care doctor refers me to a hospitalist?

If your primary care doctor refers you to a hospitalist:

- He or she will share your records and information so the hospitalist will know about your current health condition, medical history, and preferences.
- The hospitalist will examine you, and give and coordinate all other exams, tests, and treatments while you are in the hospital.

A Comparison Between...

Primary Care Doctor

Focus of Care

Outpatient care.
May include hospital care.

Experience

Trained and Licensed

May have more advanced training and experience in preventive care and long-term care of health conditions and illnesses usually diagnosed and treated in outpatient settings. Some examples are diabetes, high blood pressure, or chronic lung disease.

Relationship

Knows you, your history, and your needs from caring for you over the years. Relies on the hospitalist to learn about your hospital care.

Will share information on your health condition with you and the hospitalist, as he or she would with any specialist who helps with your care.

Accessibility

Usually is at the hospital during morning and/or evening rounds. May be available to answer questions by phone.

alist

Hospital care.

Trained and Licensed

May have more advanced training and experience treating health conditions usually treated in an inpatient setting. Some examples are severe pneumonia, strokes, or heart failure.

May be more familiar with the hospital system.

Relies on you, your medical records, and your primary care doctor to learn your history and your needs.

Will share information on your health condition with you and your primary care doctor.

Spends more time at the hospital. It may be easier for you and your family to see or talk to him or her when you have questions.

When you leave the hospital, the hospitalist will:

- Send your primary care doctor a summary of your hospital records and medications,
- Let your primary care doctor know if you need follow-up care, and
- Prescribe the medicines you need to take when you leave the hospital. Your primary care doctor will take care of refills.

Your primary care doctor gives you any care you may need after your hospital stay.

Learn About Your Options

Hospitalists are becoming more common across the country. Before you need to go in a hospital, talk to your primary care doctor. Find out who will give you care if you need to go to the hospital. Ask any questions you may have. You can talk about whether:

- You want to get your hospital care from a hospitalist, or
- You want to get your hospital care from a primary care doctor.

Hopefully, you will be able to get your hospital care the way you prefer. If not, you may have options including:

- Choosing a new primary care doctor, or
- Joining a different Medicare health plan, if one is available in your area and is accepting new members.

Talk to your doctor about your options if you want to make any changes in how you get your health care, or any other health-related issues. You, your family, and your doctor can work together to make your best health care decisions.

Studies About Quality of Care

Current studies are looking at the quality of the care that is given by both hospitalists and doctors who are not hospitalists. The studies show that you can get high quality care from either type of doctor. They also show that when hospitalists give care, good communication between the hospitalist and your primary care doctor is very important. Good communication is important any time two different doctors treat the same patient.

A Note About Advance Directives

An advance directive is a written document that tells doctors about your wishes if you can't speak for yourself. If you want to be sure your wishes are followed, it is important that you give all your doctors, including the hospitalist, a copy of your advance directive. Talk to your family and all of your doctors about your wishes.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
7500 Security Boulevard
Baltimore, MD 21244-1850

Official Business
Penalty for Private Use, \$300

Publication No. CMS - 02205
Revised April 2002



CENTERS for MEDICARE & MEDICAID SERVICES