

Carers
First

From Admission to Discharge

A Pocket Dictionary for Hospital Care





Welcome to the Carer's Dictionary: A Guide from Admission to Discharge

Caring for someone in a hospital can be overwhelming, especially when you are faced with unfamiliar medical terms, legal jargon, and complex care processes.

This pocket dictionary has been created to support you by making hospital language easier to understand. It covers key terms you might hear from doctors, nurses, or hospital staff, and explains them in clear, simple language.

You don't need to learn everything at once, just **keep this guide handy** and refer to it whenever you need a bit of clarity.

Remember, as a carer, **you play a vital role in the healthcare system.** Don't be afraid to ask the hospital staff for clarification and involvement in your loved one's hospital care.

While you will be focused on the person you care for during this time, **your wellbeing matters** too. It's okay to take breaks, ask for help, and look after your own health – physically and emotionally. You cannot pour from an empty cup, and taking care of yourself helps you continue to care for your loved one.

Legal terms

Advance Decision (ADRT/Living Will)

A legally binding document where someone refuses specific medical treatments in the future, sometimes including life-sustaining treatment.

Advance Statement

A written note of someone's preferences for future care. Not legally binding but helps guide some decisions.

Attorney

A person legally appointed to make decisions on someone else's behalf under a Power of Attorney.

Court of Protection

A court that makes decisions for people who lack mental capacity, including disputes about care or finances.

Deed of Revocation

A written statement used to cancel a registered Lasting Power of Attorney.

Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS)

A legal document used by professionals, when someone who can't make decisions is being closely supervised in a hospital or care home. If the person has a Health and Welfare LPA, the attorney must be involved, and DoLS cannot go ahead without their agreement.

Donor

The person who gives someone else the legal power to act on their behalf.

Enduring Power of Attorney (EPA)

A type of Power of Attorney made before 2007, still valid if registered, covering property and finances only.

Health and Welfare LPA

A legal document allowing someone to make decisions about another person's care, daily life, and medical treatment if they lose mental capacity.

Lasting Power of Attorney (LPA)

A legal document that lets someone appoint another person(s) to make decisions about their health and welfare, or finances and property.

Mental Capacity

A person's ability to understand information, think it through and make an informed decision.

Mental Capacity Act

A law in England and Wales that protects people who may lack capacity to make decisions. It sets out how decisions should be made in their best interests.

Ordinary Power of Attorney

A temporary legal agreement allowing someone to manage another person's finances while they still have mental capacity.

Property and Financial Affairs LPA

A legal document allowing someone to manage another person's money, bills and property.



Medical terms

Antibiotics

Medicines used to treat infections caused by bacteria. They are often prescribed after surgery or during infections such as chest infections or UTIs.

Capacity Assessment

A formal evaluation to determine if someone can make a specific decision.

Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)

Emergency treatment to restart the heart and breathing. May include chest compressions, electric shocks and rescue breaths.

Continuing Healthcare (CHC)

NHS-funded care for people with significant ongoing health needs, provided outside of hospital.

Do Not Resuscitate (DNR)

A medical order stating that CPR should not be given if the person's heart or breathing stops. It can also be referred to as do Not Attempt Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (DNACPR) or Do Not Attempt Resuscitation (DNAR).

Life-sustaining Treatment

Medical care that keeps someone alive, such as ventilation or CPR.

Occupational Therapy (OT)

Therapy to help people regain skills for daily living after an illness or injury

Reablement

Short-term support (up to 6 weeks) to help someone regain independence after a hospital stay.

Admission

The process of being formally accepted into hospital for treatment or observation.

Consultant Ward Round

A Regular visit by the senior doctor and team to review patient progress and make decisions.

Observation Chart

A record of vital signs like temperature, heart rate and blood pressure

Acute Care

Short-term treatment for a sudden illness or injury.

Triage

The process of assessing how urgent a patient's condition is to decide the order of treatment.

Tests and Scans

Biopsy

A small sample of tissue is taken from the body to be examined under a microscope.

Blood Test

A sample of blood is taken to check for infections, organ function or other health conditions.

Blood Pressure Monitoring

Measures how hard the heart is working to pump blood. Often done regularly during a hospital stay.

Blood Sugar Test (Glucose Test)

Checks the level of sugar in the blood. Important for people with diabetes or suspected blood sugar issues.

Bone Density Scan (DEXA)

Measures bone strength and is often used to check for osteoporosis.

Chest X-Ray

A common scan to check the lungs, heart, or chest area. Often used for breathing problems or infections.

Computed Tomography (CT Scan)

A detailed scan that uses X-rays and a computer to create cross-section images of the body.

Colonoscopy

A thin tube with a camera is used to examine the large bowel (colon) for signs of disease

Electrocardiogram (ECG)

A scan that uses sound waves to create images of the inside of the body. Often used for pregnancy or to check organs.

Electroencephalogram (EEG)

A test that records brain activity, often used for epilepsy or other brain conditions.

Echocardiogram (Echo)

An ultrasound scan of the heart to check how well it's working.

Endoscopy

A thin tube with a camera is used to look inside the body, often the stomach or bowel.

International Normalised Ration (INR Test)

A blood test that checks how long it takes blood to clot. Often used for people on blood-thinning medication like warfarin.

Lung Function Test (Spirometry)

Measures how well the lungs are working, often used for asthma or COPD.

Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI Scan)

A scan that uses magnets and radio waves to create detailed images of organs and tissues.

Mobility Assessment

A physical check to see how well someone can move around safely, often done before discharge.

Nutritional Assessment

Checks if someone is getting enough nutrients, especially if they have lost weight or are unwell.

Swab Test

A sample taken from the throat, nose, wound, or skin to check for infection or bacteria.

Waterlow Score

A risk assessment used to check if someone is at risk of developing pressure sores.

Ultrasound Scan

A scan that uses sound waves to create images of the inside of the body. Often used for pregnancy or to check organs.

Hospital Wards and Units

Acute Medical Unit (AMU)

A short-stay ward for patients who need urgent medical care and assessment before being moved to another ward or discharged.

Assessment Ward

A temporary ward where patients are monitored and assessed to decide the most appropriate care or discharge plan.

Cardiology Ward

Specialises in treating patients with heart-related conditions such as heart attacks, arrhythmias, or heart failure.

Coronary Care Unit (CCU)

A high-dependency unit for patients with serious heart problems needing more monitoring.

Day Surgery Unit

A unit for patients having minor surgery who can go home the same day.

Detoxification Ward

Supports patients withdrawing from alcohol or drugs in a safe, supervised environment.

Elderly Care / Geriatric Ward

Focuses on the medical and social needs of older adults, often with multiple health conditions.

Emergency Assessment Unit (EAU)

A short-stay ward where patients are assessed after arriving at A&E to decide on further treatment or discharge.

Gastroenterology Ward

Treats patients with digestive system issues, such as liver disease or bowel disorders.

General Medical Ward

Cares for patients with a wide range of non-surgical medical conditions.

General Surgical Ward

For patients recovering from surgery that is not highly specialised.

High Dependency Unit (HDU)

Provides a higher level of care than a general ward but less than intensive care. For patients needing close monitoring.

Intensive Care Unit (ICU)

For critically ill patients who need constant monitoring and life-support equipment.

Maternity Ward

For people giving birth and recovering after childbirth. May include antenatal and postnatal care.

Neonatal Unit (NICU)

Cares for newborn babies who are premature or have serious health conditions.

Neurology Ward

Treats patients with brain, spinal cord, or nerve conditions such as stroke or epilepsy.

Hospital Wards and Units

Oncology Ward

For patients receiving cancer treatment such as chemotherapy or radiotherapy.

Orthopaedic Ward

Specialises in bone, joint, and muscle conditions, including after fractures or joint replacements.

Paediatric Ward

For children and young people under 18, with staff trained in child-specific care.

Palliative Care Ward

Provides comfort-focused care for patients with life-limiting illnesses.

Psychiatric Ward

Supports people experiencing mental health crises. May include secure or open units.

Rehabilitation Ward

Helps patients regain strength and independence after illness, injury, or surgery.

Respiratory Ward

Treats lung and breathing conditions such as asthma, COPD or pneumonia.

Short Stay Ward

For patients expected to be discharge within 24-72 hours after treatment or observation.

Spinal Unit

Specialist care for patients with spinal cord injuries or diseases.

Stroke Unit

Provides specialist care and rehabilitation for people recovering from a stroke.

Surgical Assessment Unit (SAU)

Assesses patients with urgent surgical needs before deciding on surgery or discharge.

Did you know...

Patients are often moved between wards during their stay? This can happen if their condition changes, they need further tests or specialist care. You can always require more information on why the move is happening.



Hospital Roles

Anaesthetist

A doctor who gives anaesthesia and monitors patients during surgery.

Care Coordinator

A professional who helps manage and coordinate ongoing care after discharge.

Care Navigator

Helps coordinate care across services.

Carer Liaison Officer

A hospital staff member who supports carers and helps them stay informed.

Consultant

A senior doctor who leads a medical team and is responsible for a patient's care plan.

Dietitian

Advises on nutrition and special diets.

Discharge Coordinator

A professional who organises the safe discharge of a patient from hospital.

Healthcare Assistant

Supports nurses with basic care tasks.

Hospital Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

A free NHS service that helps patients, carers, and families with questions, concerns, or complaints about hospital care. They offer support, explain processes, and help resolve issues quickly and informally.

Independent Mental Capacity Advocate

Supports patients who lack capacity and have no family to make decisions for them.

Junior Doctor

A qualified doctor still in training, often the first point of contact on a ward.

Multidisciplinary Team (MDT)

A group of healthcare professionals (e.g., doctors, nurses, therapists) who plan and coordinate care.

Named Nurse

A nurse named to a patient or a group of patients during their hospital stay, acting as a main point of contact.

Occupational Therapist (OT)

Supports daily living skills and home adaptations.

Pharmacist

Ensures safe and effective use of medicines.

Physiotherapist

A specialist who helps patients regain movement and strength after illness or injury.

Psychiatrist

A doctor who specialises in mental health conditions.

Radiographer

Operates imaging equipment, such as X-Rays, CT scans.

Radiologist

A doctor who interprets scans, such as X-rays, CTs, and MRIs.

Speech and Language Therapist (SLT)

A professional who supports people with communication difficulties.

Surgeon

A doctor who performs operations on patients.

Ward manager

The senior nurse responsible for managing a hospital ward.

Discharge Planning

Carer's Assessment

An evaluation of a carer's needs to ensure they have the right support.

Complex Discharge

When a patient needs extra care or equipment after leaving the hospital.

Discharge Assessment

A review of what support the patient and carer will need after leaving the hospital.

Discharge Coordinator

A professional who organises the safe discharge of a patient from hospital.

Discharge Plan

A document outlining the care and support someone will receive after leaving the hospital.

Discharge Summary

A document sent to the GP after hospital discharge, summarising treatment and follow-up needs.

Expected Date of discharge (EDD)

The planned date for a patient to leave the hospital, set early in their stay and reviewed regularly.

Failed Discharge

When someone is discharged but needs to return to the hospital.

Home Adaptations

Changes made to a home (e.g., grab rails, ramps) to make it easier and safer for someone to live there after discharge.

Minimal Discharge

When a patient needs little or no care after leaving the hospital.



Did you know...

Carers have a legal right to be involved in discharge planning according to the Health and Care Act 2022? If your loved one consents to this, or you are their listed attorney in a Health and Welfare LTA, the hospital should:

- Keep you in mind while making decisions.
- Include you in meetings and decision-making.
- Discuss what support you are able to provide.
- Give you time to ask questions and express concerns.

Notes

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