Four steps to choosing your hospital

When you have a serious health condition that requires treatment at a hospital, you want to know you are getting the best possible care. If you are scheduling a non-emergency procedure, or want to plan ahead—just in case—it pays to take time to find the best hospital for you. And many times, there’s no place like home—the hospital closest to you is the best choice.
So, how do you choose the best hospital? It depends, in large part, on your condition. Most community hospitals do extremely well handling common health problems, such as cancer, heart disease, and joint problems. In fact, you generally receive better, faster care at your local hospital. For most people, having family, friends, and their primary care physician nearby is a top priority when they need medical attention.

**LEARN ABOUT THE CARE YOU NEED AND YOUR HOSPITAL CHOICES.**

Ask your doctor which hospitals he or she works with and which are best for your condition. If you need a specific procedure, does your local hospital perform this procedure frequently? What is their success rate? Will your primary care physician be responsible for your overall care while you’re in the hospital? Do you need a specialty hospital, teaching hospital, or one that does clinical trials related to your condition? Keep in mind, that just because a hospital offers the latest high-tech procedures does not necessarily mean those procedures result in better outcomes.

**THINK ABOUT YOUR PERSONAL AND FINANCIAL NEEDS.**

Find out which hospitals your insurance plan (or Medicare) covers and whether you need to obtain permission from your insurance company before you check in. Is the hospital convenient to family and friends? Do they provide your loved ones with updates about your condition during your stay? Can someone remain in your room overnight if you wish? Will the hospital respect and accommodate any religious or cultural needs you may have?

**COMPARE LOCAL HOSPITALS BASED ON YOUR CONDITIONS.**

Use the Hospital Compare Tool at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services’ website (www.medicare.gov/hospitalscompare/search.aspx) to check patient ratings and quality results for your nearby hospitals. U.S. News & World Report also rates hospitals annually and is another good source for information about patient ratings and success and error rates.

**DISCUSS YOUR HOSPITAL OPTIONS.**

Have a conversation with your family and primary care physician and then choose the hospital that best meets your needs.

**WHEN YOU ARE HAVING AN EMERGENCY, YOU SHOULD ALWAYS GO TO THE NEAREST HOSPITAL.**

**IF YOU NEED SPECIALIZED EMERGENCY CARE, YOUR LOCAL HOSPITAL WILL STABILIZE YOU AND THEN SAFELY TRANSPORT YOU TO ANOTHER MEDICAL FACILITY.**

Research the hospitals in your community now before you need care. Ask your doctor which hospital he or she practices in. If you have a chronic condition, such as heart disease, see how well your local hospital rates in care for that condition.