

Effective Education and Advocacy Improves Surgery Outcomes

For one member with MS (multiple sclerosis), a planned surgery was a cause for concern because no one had provided pre-operative instructions or an arrival time. The member confided in the Accordant nurse that this was a concern and prevented adequate preparation for surgery. The member was scheduled for removal of a benign spinal tumor and a T2/T3 resection. A short rehabilitation stay would also be necessary, and the member was concerned about how this would be coordinated and whether transportation would be provided during recovery and transition to the rehabilitation facility. About one month earlier, the Accordant nurse had provided education and coaching on how to prepare for surgery and had instructed the member to call back if pre-operative instructions were not provided in time for the member to prepare. Remembering this discussion, the member talked to the Accordant nurse as the surgery date drew closer and stated that there had been no instructions given about pre-operative care.

A recent study published in the journal Health Affairs found that nearly 1 in 3 patients admitted to the hospital experience an adverse event or other costly problem that could affect their health outcome.¹ Many advances have been made to better prepare patients for hospitalization, including pre-operative instructions, surgical checklists, and the addition of staff to help facilitate smooth discharge from the hospital. However, in spite of this, communication breakdowns sometimes occur, causing delays, inaccurate information, and the potential for harm. Accordant understands the importance of making sure our members are prepared for a hospital stay, as well as the transition to home or a rehabilitation center. We can work with the health plan, hospital staff, and other care providers to advocate for members and ensure that the very best information and care is provided.

The Accordant nurse understood the member's anxiety and concerns and provided reassurance that Accordant would work collaboratively with health care providers and advocate where necessary to help ensure the surgery and rehabilitation went smoothly. Good preparation and information is essential to reduce misadventures from-- for example-- medication problems, missed provider feedback, or failure of therapy to start as prescribed. Careful planning is important to help avoid readmission and promote a positive health outcome and post-operative healing. When members are informed, they are equipped with the potential for good planning and reducing clinical complications, as well as reduced stress and a greater ability to focus on the healing process. Accordant nurses can work behind the scenes to advocate for members with their health care providers to ensure smooth transitions from the hospital to a rehabilitation facility when needed and ultimately, to the home environment. Ultimately, these actions play an integral role in effective utilization and lower healthcare costs for the member and the health plan.

The Accordant nurse first contacted the surgeon's office to alert the staff that this member had not received pre-operative instructions or even a time to arrive at the hospital for surgery. Next, the nurse followed up with the member to ensure that the instructions had been received, educated the member on the importance of following the instructions, and then asked a few questions to verify that the member understood the preparation required for surgery. The pre-operative instructions also included medications the member should avoid prior to surgery and they discussed these at length. Together, they also talked through a plan for transportation to the hospital and the rehabilitation center and the Accordant nurse made sure that the member felt comfortable with the arrangements in place.

The member had a successful surgery and rehabilitation stay. Since returning home, the member has done well and has not reported any falls or trips to the emergency room. The member was very thankful for the advocacy and educational support provided by the Accordant nurse during a stressful and critical time. Good preparation and understanding of all aspects of care around a scheduled surgery can ultimately enhance health outcomes and lower the chance for complications while hospitalized or during the immediate post-operative period.

1. US Department of Health and Human Services. Fact Sheet: Partnership for Patients: Better Care, Lower Costs. Bethesda, MD: Health.gov; 11 Apr 2011. <http://www.healthcare.gov/news/factsheets/2011/04/partnership04122011a.html>. Accessed April 9, 2013.

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