

Difficult Decisions about Post-Acute Care **A Conversation on PAC and the Patient Perspective**

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Project Aims

- To **examine how decisions about post-acute care (PAC) are made** during hospital discharge planning, especially when care in a SNF is needed
- To better understand the complex **factors that can influence those decisions**, with a special focus on **communication and information sharing** among providers, patients, and families
- To identify **opportunities and strategies for improving communication, practices, and policies** that could better support more informed decision-making

What Is PAC

Skilled nursing/rehab services delivered by 4 types of providers:

- **Skilled Nursing Facilities (SNFs)**
- **Home Health Agencies (HHAs)**
- Inpatient Rehabilitation Facilities (IRFs)
- Long-Term Care Hospitals (LTCHs)

Methods

Information Scan – reviewed literature, regulatory framework, quality measures on websites, innovative tools, best practices for filling gaps in decision support

Expert Interviews (27) – with researchers, advisors, stakeholders, policymakers, innovators, and others

Patient and Family Caregiver Discussion Groups and Interviews – with 17 people who had experienced discharge planning for PAC in a SNF

Meetings with leaders and frontline staff involved in discharge planning for PAC - 8 hospitals in the NY metro area; **phone interviews** with administrators at **5 SNFs** in the NY metro area

Why Decisions about PAC Should Matter to Patients

- **Quality varies** among PAC providers. Patients who receive care from lower quality providers have higher **risk of complications and worse outcomes, contributing to rising costs, including out-of-pocket costs.**
- **Choosing carefully** can mean the difference between full recovery, cycling in and out of facilities, becoming a nursing home resident, or early death.



Other Key Findings Relevant to Patients and Families

Demand for PAC is growing, but many factors can constrain a patient's choice of setting and provider. Yet, patients and families are often unaware of what those constraints are.

Decision-making can pose daunting challenges for patients and families. Yet hospital staff involvement varies and can fall short due to unintended consequences of regulation.

Discharge planning is complex and time-sensitive. Hospital staff, patients, families feel pressure to reach decisions rapidly. Opportunities for key steps or information to slip lead to communication gaps.

Public information has limits, not especially helpful for trying to figure out the best option. Provider lists commonly distributed by hospital discharge planners comply with regulations, but are insufficient.

Existing legal safeguards don't go far enough to support informed decision-making during hospital discharge planning.

Common Research Strategies for Patients and Families Choosing PAC

Wait for it

- Some did little to no research, waiting for guidance from hospital staff that they typically didn't get

Major Research Project (with reinforcements)

- Some made a full scale project of visiting facilities, combing websites, and consulting friends

Know a Professional

- Asked their health professional friends (RNs, MDs, PTs, etc.) for recommendations, to investigate options, and help make choices. Some brought friends who were former staff on their visits to SNFs

Word of Mouth (WOM)

- Many relied on WOM recommendations, but sometimes found them to be unreliable due to outdated expectations of care (e.g. LOS, staffing levels, health plan participation)

Information Barriers for Patients and Families Choosing PAC

Language

- Online info and reviews often only in English

Computer Literacy

- Many relied on younger family members or friends to help with research and to translate information, citing language and computer literacy barriers

Marketing v. Information

- Websites were largely promotional and lacked specifics on services, activities, staffing

Understanding Quality Measures

- Some patients and families who did use websites like Nursing Home Compare found quality ratings unhelpful because they didn't seem relevant to short-term stays

Timeliness

- Consumer review sites like Yelp, Facebook, Google user-reviews, were seen as helpful because they described people's real, recent experiences

What's Important to Patients and Caregivers when Choosing a PAC Setting?

Location

Convenient for family/friends

Some willing to go further for specific services

Intensity and Availability of Services

Frequency of physical therapy

Special services available? e.g. ventilator, specific disease supports (e.g. ALS), on-site dialysis

Ongoing Care

For patients who won't be able to go home, Is the PAC setting appropriate for transition to long-term care?

Finances

Is the PAC facility in-network?

Will the facility take patients with expensive medication needs?

Six Pathways to Progress

Engage	Patients and Families in Discharge Planning for PAC
Improve	The Discharge Planning Process
Bridge Silos	To Create the Conditions for Informed Decision-Making
Address	Regulatory and Payment Policy Barriers
Enhance	Public Information and Transparency
Increase	Public and Professional Awareness

UHF Difficult Decisions Report Series

1. [*Difficult Decisions About Post-Acute Care and Why They Matter*](#)
2. [*The Illusion of Choice: Why Decisions About Post-Acute Care Are Difficult for Patients and Family Caregivers*](#)
3. [*Health Care Provider Perspectives on Discharge Planning: From Hospital to Skilled Nursing Facility*](#)
4. [*Pathways to Progress on Difficult Decisions in Post-Acute Care*](#)

Free downloads available at

<https://uhfnyc.org/initiatives/post-acute-care/>



- Sharrie McIntosh, Laura Eldon, Jannel Tillman, and New York State Health Foundation
- Today's Conversation Participants and Audience