Practical Guide to the Health Care System:
Preparing for a hospital stay

Being ready for a planned hospital stay decreases anxiety. Here are important aspects to handle in advance:

List all your medications. Include all the over-the-counter drugs, vitamins and herbal and dietary supplements you take. Note how long you have been taking each and the dosage. Give your doctor a copy of this list, and keep one for yourself.

Have a pre-surgery talk with your doctor. Understand the risks and benefits of the procedure and any pertinent test results. There is usually a lot to absorb at one time; good notes can really help.

Ask a friend or family member to accompany you and serve as your advocate, asking questions and taking notes. At the very least, bring a notebook and take notes yourself.

Gather important papers. Bring your social security number, a photo ID and your insurance card. If you have advance directives (power of attorney of health care, living will), bring copies. You may want lab work and X-rays as well.

Pack personal necessities. You may be able to wear your own pajamas and slippers while in the hospital. Bring loose-fitting underwear and socks, too. A sweater can ward off chills. Don’t forget your eyeglasses. Toiletries are a nice addition as is lip balm. (Leave perfumes and heavily scented products at home.) Include some pleasant pastimes – a book, a magazine, writing paper, pen, small photos or mementos. Bring a small amount of cash; leave credit cards at home. Print out friends’ phone numbers. Check the hospital’s policy about electronic items before you pack your laptop or cell phone. Items like these are often discouraged or even forbidden and are also targets for theft.

Plan your absence from home. Pay any household bills that will come due during your stay, water your plants and arrange for pet care while you are gone.

Coming in October: Prepare for being discharged

The ABCs of cholesterol

Cholesterol is the soft, waxy substance found in all parts of the body. While your body needs some of it to work properly, too much can clog your arteries and lead to heart problems.

Experts recommend that you have a cholesterol test starting at age twenty and re-test every five years. High cholesterol levels usually don’t have signs or symptoms, so this test is a really important tool in determining if you are at risk for heart disease.

A complete cholesterol test, called a lipid panel or profile, is a blood test that measures fats (lipids) in your body:

- LDL (low-density lipoprotein) – Too much of this “bad cholesterol” causes a buildup of fatty deposits (plaques) in your arteries that reduce blood flow and might lead to a heart attack or stroke. Target LDL numbers vary, depending on your risk of heart disease, but most people should aim for a level below 130.

- HDL (high-density lipoprotein) – “Good cholesterol” helps carry away LDL so blood flows freely. 60 or more is best.

- Triglycerides – Your body converts any calories it doesn’t need into triglycerides stored in fat cells. Below 150 is desirable.

- Total cholesterol is the sum of your blood’s cholesterol content. Below 200 is desirable.

Cholesterol is an important aspect of health. Check with your nearest Advocate hospital for information about screenings, classes and education related to cholesterol.

Prayer: Dear Lord, remind me to pause and take a reckoning of my lifestyle and health habits. Help me make those changes necessary to live a long and healthy life. Amen.