

Understanding Inpatient vs. Outpatient Hospital Status:

What Caregivers Need to Know

When your care partner goes to the hospital, one of the most important—but often confusing—details is whether they are considered **inpatient** or **outpatient** status. This classification affects not only the type of care they receive but also how Medicare covers the costs.

What Is Inpatient Status?

A patient is considered inpatient when they are formally admitted to the hospital with a doctor's order. This usually means they need more intensive care, monitoring, or treatment that can't be provided on an outpatient basis. Inpatient care is covered under Medicare Part A (Hospital Insurance).

Some examples of inpatient care include:

- Major surgery (e.g., hip replacement, heart bypass)
- Serious illness (e.g., pneumonia, stroke, heart attack)
- Recovery after an accident (e.g., broken bones needing surgery)

What Is Outpatient Status?

A patient is considered outpatient if they are receiving hospital services but have not been formally admitted. This includes emergency room visits, observation stays, same-day surgeries, and diagnostic tests. Outpatient care is covered under Medicare Part B (Medical Insurance).

Even if your care partner stays overnight in a hospital bed, they may still be classified as outpatient if they are under observation rather than admitted.

Why It Matters for Medicare

The difference between inpatient and outpatient status can significantly affect:

- **Coverage and costs:** Medicare Part A typically covers inpatient hospital stays after the deductible is met. Outpatient services under Part B may involve copayments for each service, and the Part B deductible applies. However, costs and coverage may be different if your care partner has a Medicare Advantage Plan, also known as Medicare Part C.

- **Eligibility for short-term rehabilitation** in a skilled nursing facility (SNF): Medicare will only cover SNF care if your care partner has had a qualifying inpatient hospital stay of at least three consecutive days. Time spent under outpatient or observation status does not count toward this requirement.

Tips for Caregivers

- **Ask questions:** Don't hesitate to ask the hospital staff whether your care partner is considered inpatient or outpatient.
- **Get it in writing:** Request a copy of the admission notice or status determination.
- **Plan ahead:** If your care partner may need rehab in a skilled nursing facility after the hospital, make sure they meet the inpatient requirement to avoid surprise costs. *****

Understanding hospital status can be tricky, but being informed helps you advocate for your care partner and navigate Medicare more confidently.



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