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THE HOLIDAY SEASON IS HAZARDOUS FOR HOSPITAL PATIENTS

Hospital care is especially hazardous to patient health during the holiday season, as nurse-to-patient ratios increase, temporary nurse staffing is brought in who aren't familiar with the hospital or its routine, and physicians tend to be away. This increases the probability of medical error. According to a Duke University Medical Center study, hospital deaths increase from December 25-January 7. The study found that patients were less likely to receive medications and treatments and less likely to be treated appropriately for cardiac infarctions. All due to reduced hospital staffing.

Martine Ehrenclou, author of the new book *Critical Conditions: The Essential Hospital Guide to Get Your Loved One Out Alive* (Lemon Grove Press) interviewed over 150 doctors and nurses and discovered that hospital care in crisis. This crisis is exacerbated during the holiday season.

Here are five steps to increase your chances of surviving a hospital stay between December 24 and January 7.

1. **Ask a loved one to act as your eyes and ears during your hospital stay.** There must always be someone—a family member or good friend—to act as a sentinel or watchdog to oversee your hospital, medical care in an effort to prevent medical errors. You as the hospitalized patient cannot do this for yourself as you are recuperating. Ask your loved one to get a notebook and write down your hospital room, your physicians' and primary nurses' names and contact information, your diagnosis, treatment plan and medications.
2. **To prevent medication mistakes.** Ask your loved one to write down your medications and dosages and list what the medication looks like, the shape and color of any pills, the names on the labels of bottles or IV bags. Because labels and bottles can look and sound alike, ask your loved one to make sure that they recognize the medication when it is administered. If they don't, they must ask questions. Your allergies to medications must be in your chart. Your loved one must repeat this information to your primary nurse.

3. **To prevent surgery on the wrong body part.** Your loved one must accompany you to the operating room and request to see the surgeon. They must ask this doctor to mark on your body the correct site to be operated on and which surgery is to be performed. If the surgeon is not available, your loved one must ask to see the anesthesiologist and other staff involved in your care and repeat this checklist with each one.
4. **To prevent the spread of hospital-acquired infectious diseases.** Among the most virulent are MRSA and pneumonia. Your loved one must ask everyone, including physicians and nurses, to wash their hands and put disposable gloves before touching you. Antibacterial gel should be placed next to your bed and everyone must be asked to use it.
5. **To prevent patient name mistakes.** With each hospital staff member who either comes to pick you up for a procedure or who is to administer a treatment, ask your loved one to match your name with the correct procedure. They must repeat this checklist with each hospital staff person.

Above all, your loved one should try to be with you as much as possible. If you are in pain, you don't want to repeatedly call for a nurse who doesn't come. Patients with involved family members get more attention. For a short period of time, your loved ones will help facilitate this. They could save your life.

Martine Ehrenclou, MA, is the author of *Critical Conditions: The Essential Hospital Guide To Get Your Loved One Out Alive*, (Lemon Grove Press) www.criticalconditions.com