

## Is There a Hospitalist in your Future?

by Phyllis Edelson



Advances in technology and research, as well as in financial incentives have changed medicine a lot over the past 20 years. Those changes have contributed to the upward trend of care provided by Hospitalists, doctors who specialize in providing care to in-hospital patients.

Hospitalists are equally as qualified as their office-based counterparts, having undertaken the same training and board certifications as other internal medicine doctors. The main difference between the practitioners is that hospitalists have elected to work exclusively in hospitals, while most primary care internists and family practitioner are now entirely office based.

The move to hospitalists has been driven by a number of factors including convenience, efficiency, financial strains on primary care doctors, patient safety, cost-effectiveness and the need for more specialized and coordinated care for in patients.

There are many advantages to having hospitalists on staff. For example, the hospitalist has greater expertise in caring for patients with complicated conditions on a daily basis. These doctors are also better able to provide care when emergency situations arise. Additionally, because hospitalists are available on a daily basis they closely track test results and promptly order follow-up tests. With hospitalists on staff, nurses have found that they can ask and get answers to questions to quickly implement orders that impact the patient's care.

Hospitalists are familiar with hospital policies and activities and are often involved with committees that assist in improving all aspects of the hospital stay. For patients and families, the rise of this new specialty may well require getting used to a different model of care. When hospitalized, patients may now see hospitalists rather than their primary care doctors.

The hospitalist will check on your progress when you are admitted to the hospital, during your stay and when you are ready to be discharged. They will also contact your primary care physician to confirm your medical history and medications and provide progress updates.

In short, hospitalists are the point people who coordinate communication with other doctors and nurses, answer questions, provide updates and outline comprehensive care plans. They are also readily available to provide patients' families with information about progress, including test results and other issues.



Patients do need to be aware that there is a downside to having a hospitalist take care of you. He or she may not know your detailed medical history as well as your long-standing primary care physician. If you have an office-based primary doctor as well as multiple specialists it takes a while for all your doctors to receive complete details of your hospitalization.

These issues are continuing to be addressed. Communication between the hospitalist and primary care doctor is vital. Coordination between the two means that whether seen by a hospitalist or their primary care physician, hospitalized patients can be confident of the quality of their medical care.