Discharge Planning
Long-Term Acute Care (LTAC) Hospitals

Sometimes, when a patient has very complex or particularly challenging health care needs, a transfer to a specialty hospital may be proposed by the attending or consulting physicians who are caring for the patient. These specialty hospitals are known as Long-Term Acute Care Hospitals (LTACs).

An LTAC is different from a traditional acute care hospital in that staff at the LTAC are experts at providing ongoing care to the patient over a longer period of time than a traditional hospital is normally used to doing. They have become experts at this because of the fact that all of the patients they care for are in a similar condition with extended complex needs, whereas the majority of the patients cared for at a traditional hospital are anticipated to require a short length of stay. Transferring a patient to an LTAC allows the traditional hospital to more appropriately utilize their resources to care for the more acutely ill patient whose needs could not be met in another type of facility.

Once the physician has talked to you about the possibility of a transfer to an LTAC, a social worker will begin working with you on which placement options are available to you. Choice of an LTAC facility will depend on many factors including bed availability, medical needs, insurance contracts, and continuity of present physicians continuing to follow the patient at the LTAC. A referral will be made by the social worker to the potential LTAC facilities and a representative of the LTAC will come to the hospital to thoroughly review the patient’s medical record, to assist in determining whether or not the LTAC could accept the patient for admission. They will be considering both medical and financial factors in their decision. Once acceptance has been determined, your family/friends will be invited to tour the accepting LTAC facilities. This is particularly important if multiple facilities are able to accept and you need to make a choice between facilities.

The decision to actually transfer the patient to the LTAC is made when physicians at both the traditional hospital and the LTAC agree that the patient is ready to make that transition. Medical records are copied and sent with the patient at the time of transfer. The patient is transported in an ambulance with all necessary equipment/technology required by the patient in the ambulance for the patient’s use. All members of the health care team are working to ensure a smooth, safe transition of the patient’s care.