

Tips and Sample Questions for Interviewing Patients Who Have Been Hospitalized Three or More Times in the Last Six to Nine Months

Sit next to the patient at the bedside, and make eye contact. You may consider removing your white coat beforehand in order to help the patient feel comfortable opening up to you. Briefly introduce yourself and explain that you are interested in helping patients get better care. Ask the patient if he or she would mind if you ask a few questions to get to know him or her better.

If the patient does not want to talk to you, respect his or her decision. Ask if the patient would like you to come back if he or she is admitted to the hospital again. It may take some time for the patient to want to open up, and this step shows that you are committed to helping the patient on his or her own terms.

If the patient is willing to talk, here are some sample questions to help you get started. Be prepared with follow-up questions if you initially get short responses. It may take time to draw out the patient. Work more on forming a connection with the patient and getting to know him or her, rather than following a rigid script.

1. What's your name?
2. Do you live nearby?
3. Where did you grow up? (Possible follow-ups: What did you like about growing up there? What did you dislike? Why? Are you still close with friends from those days?)
4. What are some of the things you enjoy doing? (Possible follow-ups: How often do you get to do that these days? What would make it easier for you to do this more often? What is your best memory of doing that? What do you usually do on weekends?)
5. Can you tell me a little about how you ended up in the hospital? (Let the patient tell his or her story. Allow the patient to talk for as long as he or she wishes.) (Possible follow-ups: What time of day was it? Were you alone or was someone there with you? Who took you here or called the ambulance? Was there anything different about this trip from other trips to the hospital?)
6. I noticed you've been in the hospital a lot lately. Would you like to talk about what else is going on with your health? (Possible follow-ups: Who do you currently talk to about your health? How do you get there? Do you feel like they understand you? Do they listen to you?)
7. Can you tell me about some of your good and bad experiences with the health care system? (Possible follow-up: What could have made that experience (even) better?)

8. Do you have any problems getting the care you need? Can you share with me some of these problems? (Possible prompts: What was it like getting to the appointment? Did you have to wait long? Reschedule? Do you have any co-pays? Not sure who you should see? Difficulty getting the medicines you need?)

9. Do you have a primary care physician? In other words, do you have a regular doctor who you can call or see when you are having less urgent health problems but don't know what to do? (Possible follow-ups: Does what he/she prescribes to you make sense or seem like something you can do? Why or why not? What would you like the doctor to know or think about that you haven't already discussed with him/her? Do you feel like that is something you could tell your doctor?)

10. Are there other members of your family or the community who check in on you, or to whom you can turn when you aren't feeling well? What about social workers, case managers, or other members of your health care team? Would you mind if I contacted some of them to talk about ways to help you together?

If family members are present, you may want to include them in the conversation as well. They can provide additional clues about the patient's experience, background, and barriers to care.