

Inpatient vs outpatient- hospital status can affect your costs.

from Erin Curtin

Did you know that even if you stay in a hospital overnight, you still might be considered an **outpatient**? Your status as **inpatient** or **outpatient** when you are in the hospital can impact your costs and may affect whether Medicare will cover the care you get in a skilled nursing facility following your hospital stay. This can be very confusing. The decision for inpatient hospital admission is a complex medical decision based on the doctor's judgement and your need for medically necessary hospital care. For you to become an inpatient, the doctor must order admission and the hospital must formally admit you.

Inpatient:

You are an **inpatient** starting when you are **formally admitted to the hospital with a doctor's order**.

Outpatient:

You are an **outpatient** if you are getting **observation services**, emergency department services, outpatient surgery, lab tests, X-rays, or any other hospital services and **the doctor hasn't written an order to admit you to the hospital as an inpatient**.

Observation services are hospital outpatient services you get while your doctor decides whether to admit you as inpatient. You can get observation services in the emergency department or another area of the hospital. Many people are surprised to learn that even though they stayed overnight in the hospital, they were not formally admitted and were receiving observation services.

****Remember: Even if you stay overnight in a regular hospital bed, you may still be an outpatient.***

****Remember: Each day you stay in the hospital, you should ask the hospital and/or your doctor, a hospital social worker or patient advocate if you are an inpatient or outpatient.***

How does your hospital status affect how Medicare covers your stay in a skilled nursing facility?

Medicare will only cover the care you get in a skilled nursing facility (SNF) if you have a **qualifying inpatient hospital stay**. This means you have been a hospital **inpatient** for at least 3 days in a row (counting the day you were admitted as an inpatient but not counting the day of your discharge). Remember that "observation services" are considered outpatient and those do not count toward the 3-day qualifying hospital stay. (over)

What about rehabilitation hospitals such as Encompass Health in Ludlow?

Rehabilitation hospitals provide intensive post-acute rehabilitation services, such as physical, occupational, and speech therapy. This setting is not appropriate for everyone when they are discharged from the hospital. You do not need to have a 3-day qualifying hospital stay for Medicare to pay for your care in a rehab hospital. However, your doctor must certify that you have a medical condition that requires intensive rehabilitation, continued medical supervision, and coordinated care that comes from your doctors and therapists working together.

For more information visit: <https://www.medicare.gov/>