

Fact of FAITH

Hospital Stays

by Rev. Larry Rice, CSP

There was a time in the not-too-distant past, when most large hospitals had a Catholic priest chaplain, who would get a list of all the Catholic patients and make rounds in the hospital, visiting patients, distributing Communion, and anointing those who were gravely ill. Today, two factors have changed Catholic hospital ministry.

The first significant change has to do with laws governing the distribution of healthcare-related information. Most hospitals will not give out any patient information that hasn't been explicitly released by the patient. So, lists of patients to visit may be incomplete or non-existent. Another major change is related to the nationwide shortage of priests: most hospitals today don't have a full-time chaplain, and many don't have even part-time coverage.

So, if you're anticipating a hospital stay, here's what I'd recommend: First, notify your local parish. If possible, make an appointment for the Anointing of the Sick before you are admitted. When you are admitted to the hospital, tell them your religious affiliation, and give permission to share that information with their pastoral care department. Then, once you're in a room and cleared to receive visitors, call your parish office, and let them know what room you're in, and that you'd like to receive a visit. That visitor may be your pastor, but it may also be a parish volunteer or an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion. Finally, when you're discharged, let your parish know that you're home, and whether you'd like further visits at home.

The Church wants to provide appropriate pastoral care to its members who are hospitalized. With a little information from you, about where you are and what you need, we have a better chance of providing that care.

Father Rice is Vocations Director for the Paulist Fathers