



Comprehensive Guide to Long-Term Care Hospitals

Introduction

Long-term care hospitals (LTCHs) specialize in treating patients with serious and complicated conditions requiring more care than offered by traditional hospitals. The LTCHs are for patients who are no longer requiring intensive care but still need treatment at the hospital level for a longer period. The average length of stay in LTCHs is more than 25 days. This guide will explain the role of LTCHs, what kind of care they provide, and how to choose the appropriate place where patients will find the time needed for recovery.

What is a Long-Term Care Hospital?

LTCHs provide care to the patients with serious, long-lasting medical conditions. These patients' conditions have stabilized but still require hospital services such as ventilator support, wound care, and rehabilitation. The **American Hospital Association** reports that today there are **337 Medicare-certified LTCHs** in the United States. They treat patients mostly transitioning from ICUs. The average length of stay of patients in an LTCH is at least **25 days**, which makes these hospitals qualify under Medicare Part A.



Who Qualifies for LTCH Care?

Patients who benefit from LTCH services have the following conditions:

- **Medically Complex Conditions:** These include prolonged mechanical ventilation, chronic wound condition, and deep-seated infections. A study shows **40% of the LTCH patients** require long-term ventilator assistance.
- **Extended Hospital-Level Care:** Patient needs hospital-level care for a more extensive period than usual, including managing infection and extended recovery after surgery.
- **Physician Referral:** LTCH admissions are normally due to a physician referral. It is those that come from acute care hospitals or even intensive care units.

Key Services Provided by LTCHs

LTCHs offer specialized care not found in other types of healthcare facilities, such as:

1. **Respiratory Therapy:** Among the most important services, respiratory therapy contains management for patients under ventilators. **Fifty percent of LTCH admissions** involve respiratory support.
2. **Wound Care:** LTCHs specialize in managing chronic and critical wounds, such as pressure ulcers, along with post-surgical wounds, which require significant medical intervention.

3. **Rehabilitation:** LTCHs provide multidisciplinary physical, occupational, and speech therapy to patients suffering from a stroke, traumatic brain injury, and other severe illnesses.
4. **Infection Control:** LTCHs treat patients who suffer with chronic infections that require long term intravenous antibiotics and special infection management techniques.

How LTCHs Differ from Other Facilities

LTCHs are uniquely positioned within a continuum of care compared to skilled nursing facilities (SNFs) and rehabilitation hospitals. A few key differences are:

- **Length of Stay:** Patients in SNFs or rehabilitation centers tend to have much shorter stays, around 20 days; LTCHs are established to provide hospital-level care for patients with a stay of more than **25 days**.
- **Complexity of Care:** LTCHs provide more acute, hospital-level care for patients with a serious illness not curable in less acute settings such as SNFs or outpatient care facilities.
- **Cost and Coverage:** LTCH care is more expensive because of the intensive and specialized nature of the services provided. Medicare Part A usually covers most of the costs, but the patient will pay for part of their care depending on how long they spend in the LTCH, because Medicare does not cover longer than 90 days.

Medicare Coverage for LTCH Care

Medicare Part A is the primary source of payment for patients receiving care in LTCHs. The cost structure related to Medicare-covered LTCH stays includes:

- **First 60 Days:** Medicare pays all costs after a **\$1,632 deductible** (as of 2024), which is the same as for short-term hospital stays.
- **Days 61-90:** After that 60-day period ends, patients are required to pay a co-payment of **\$408 per day**.
- **Beyond 90 Days:** During this period, patients may utilize their **lifetime reserve days** and be covered up to 60 days with a **copayment of \$816 per day**. After that, they will pay for their entire care.

LTCH care is covered by Medicare, when the patients are transferred from acute care hospitals or ICUs. In fact, **60% of LTCH patients** are transferred directly from the ICU.

Selecting the Right LTCH

Choosing the right LTCH is necessary to make a successful recovery. The following are key things that should be taken into consideration while choosing a facility:

1. **Location:** Select an LTCH that is geographically close to the patient and their family so that the caregivers can actively participate in the recovery.

2. **Services Provided:** Not all LTCHs provide the same range of services. If a patient requires specialized care, such as ventilator weaning or advanced wound management, make sure that the LTCH specializes in these areas.
3. **Quality Ratings and Outcomes:** Look for LTCHs that have high-quality ratings, including low infection levels and high patient satisfaction results. [Long-Term Care Hospitals](#) directory provide detailed profiles and comparisons of Medicare-certified LTCHs, including information on their quality grades and performance measures.
4. **Medicare and Insurance:** If the patient has an illness that necessitates an extended period of a medical visit, ensure that the LTCH accepts Medicare or the patient's insurance plan. Consider out-of-pocket expenses, especially if a patient is going to be there longer than Medicare's allowable days.

Common Conditions Treated in LTCHs

LTCHs care for patients suffering from a range of complex medical conditions including:

- **Respiratory Failure:** Patients who require long-term ventilator support or require treatment for a chronic respiratory condition, such as COPD, often are treated in LTCHs.
- **Chronic Infections:** Patients with conditions like osteomyelitis or sepsis that require prolonged antibiotic treatment often receive treatment in LTCHs.
- **Neurological Disorders:** Patients who have strokes and those with traumatic brain injuries benefit from LTCHs rehabilitation processes to increase their independence and quality of life.
- **Severe Wounds:** Patients with chronic wounds, pressure ulcers, and diabetic wounds among others are treated with focused care on their wounds using the therapeutic intervention of hyperbaric oxygen in LTCHs.

Caregivers' Role in LTCH Care

Caregivers play a significant role in the recovery of patients who stay in LTCHs. Here are few recommendations for caregivers:

1. **Stay Involved:** Make sure you attend all the care-planning meetings and interact regularly with the patient's health care team. Being proactive will ensure that the caregiver is kept informed of the patient's needs and treatment plan.
2. **Monitor Care Quality:** Caregivers should regularly visit the patient and determine whether the patient's needs are met. This includes cleanliness of the facility, adequate pain management, and whether the facility follows health care protocols.
3. **Plan for Transitions:** Many patients transition to some other healthcare setting after being in an LTCH, such as a skilled nursing facility or outpatient care. Caregivers should make plans for additional care well ahead of time to ensure a seamless transition.

The Role of Long-Term Care Hospitals in the Healthcare System

LTCHs do perform a crucial function in the healthcare delivery system. These institutions provide extended care services for those patients who remain in need of long-term care but are not ready for discharge to home or a less-intensive care setting. As LTCHs specialize in complex medical needs patients, they help ease the burden on acute hospitals and improve patient outcomes through this specialty service.

As healthcare technology continues to evolve, LTCHs will extend their services to include more advanced treatments for medically complex patients. This makes them a critical resource for patients requiring long-term, specialized care.

Conclusion

Long-term care hospitals serve as key facilities through which patients with serious medical conditions requiring extended hospital stays are provided with specific services aimed at enabling them to make full recoveries in the shortest possible time.

If you are considering long-term care hospitals, here is what you should look at in the facility: services offered by the facility, quality ratings, and the location, ensuring that you or your loved ones are in the best hands. Explore and compare facilities on [Long-Term Care Hospitals](#).

Bibliography

- **American Hospital Association.** (2023). "Long-Term Care Hospitals Statistics." www.aha.org
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- **Medicare Advocacy.** (2023). "Medicare Coverage in Long-Term Care Hospitals." <https://medicareadvocacy.org/>