



## HELPFUL HINTS

### Advocating for a Family Member in Healthcare Situations

#### Overview

Being an advocate for a family member in health-related matters is one of the most important and often most challenging roles caregivers must assume. You may find yourself frustrated trying to obtain needed information and assistance. You may at times feel that you are not being heard or understood or that you are not up to assuming this role.

Always remember advocating, like caregiving itself, is a process, not an event. You are dealing with a healthcare service delivery system that is complex and often fragmented. Varying sets of instructions from multiple professionals may cause confusion. Needed services are not always easy to find. You will learn from each experience as you advocate for your loved one and gain knowledge and skill in a step-by-step fashion. Feeling capable, competent, and effective in this role takes time.

*HELPFUL HINTS: Advocating for a Family Member in Healthcare Situations*, prepared in collaboration with the National Alliance for Caregiving (NAC), will provide you with ideas to help you on the road to becoming an effective advocate for care.

#### Key Considerations

##### 1. Appreciate your role in the care team

It is important that you always keep in mind the underlying reason for your advocating activities: the desire for quality care, respect, comfort, safety, and dignity for your family member. You are an important part of the care team and a resource for others who provide care to your loved one.

##### 2. Communicate with your family member

Remember the first rule of caregiving: include care receivers to the fullest extent possible in conversations and decisions affecting their lives. Focus on your family member's wishes as you work to advocate on his or her behalf.

##### 3. Develop a plan of action

To get what you need, take one step at a time. Set realistic goals, that is, ones you feel you can achieve. The many details you often need to attend to can be overwhelming. Having a plan that breaks them down and allows you to accomplish various pieces along the way makes the overall task seem more manageable.

##### 4. Consider what questions to ask and be prepared

Physicians and other health care professionals often have limited time to spend with you. Decide what information is most important and ask those questions first. Write down your questions prior to any conversation. Healthcare situations are often stressful and you may forget to ask something of importance that you had intended to inquire about. Be as concise as possible.

##### 5. Write things down

Effective advocating requires attention to facts and details that may need to be referred to in the future. Write down answers you receive to questions you may have asked of physicians, other health care professionals, or insurance personnel. Keep a log of contacts, phone numbers, names, dates, and information acquired in one place, so you can easily retrieve it if needed.

## 6. *Remain calm*

In any conversation you have with health care staff, insurance personnel, or others on behalf of your loved one, regardless of where it takes place, try to remain calm and confident that the information you seek and what you have to say is important to the care he or she is receiving. Feeling angry or helpless at that moment will only get in your way. Remain polite, positive, and open in all discussions.

## 7. *Be persistent and follow-up*

Finding the answers you need may take more time and effort than you expected. You could find yourself transferred to multiple people if you are seeking information over the phone. You may need to make multiple calls and/or send emails or letters to get answers to your questions or concerns. Do not give up. Repeated attempts do produce results.

## 8. *Identify key contacts in the care setting*

In whatever setting your loved one is receiving care, it is important to identify a key individual(s) who can serve as a regular point of contact. This person can be a resource for information about your family member, a liaison with other members of the care team to raise any concerns or questions you may have, and a source of information about the setting and its procedures.

## 9. *Maintain open communication with the care team*

As an advocate, it is important that you establish relationships and maintain contact with the care team, whether your family member is receiving care at home or in another setting. Care providers need to be aware of any changes in your family member's health or treatment, any concerns you may have about the care he or she is receiving, and the aspects of care that you are particularly pleased with.

## 10. *Learn from the experience of others*

You may want to consider a caregiver support group. It is often helpful to discuss your concerns with others in a similar situation. They may have suggestions from their experience which will help you in your efforts to advocate for your loved one. You can usually find out about groups in your area by contacting the Eldercare Locator, a government sponsored program to assist with finding local resources. You can access it on-line at [www.eldercare.gov](http://www.eldercare.gov) or by phone by calling 1-800-677-1116, M-F, 9 a.m.-8 p.m. EST.

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### **MetLife Mature Market Institute®**

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### **National Alliance for Caregiving**

Established in 1996, the National Alliance for Caregiving, [www.caregiving.org](http://www.caregiving.org), is a nonprofit coalition of national organizations that focuses on issues of family caregiving across the life span. The Alliance was created to conduct research, do policy analysis, develop national programs, and increase public awareness of family caregiving issues.