

A Patient Advocate – Your Lifeline in a Health Crisis

Never has the role of a patient advocate become more apparent since COVID19 protocols came into effect. Restrictions for in person support to loved ones struggling with a health event has left many families beyond hope and patients beyond help.

There can be no circumstance where a patient is denied access to an in-person advocate when faced with a health crisis.

There is NO requirement for a patient or visitor to partake into any test or treatment.

Urgent treatment CANNOT be denied based on testing or vaccination.

All medical care should be undertaken after risk/benefit analysis has been taken into consideration and with FULLY INFORMED CONSENT.

When a health issue arises, especially an urgent one, we immediately feel vulnerable. Even the most resilient, independent and confident of us can feel powerless and overwhelmed. Having someone you trust to talk to, to support you and be with you if needed for consult and treatments is quite literally a lifeline.

According to John Hopkins Medicine, only 70% of us have a patient advocate.

What is a Patient Advocate?

A patient advocate is someone who supports another person facing a health challenge.

To be clear: a patient advocate is NOT a healthcare proxy.

- An advocate talks, supports and acts according to your instructions
- A medical proxy acts if you are NOT able to make judgments or express your wishes and would be identified in your medical directive.

What is the Role of a Patient Advocate?

- To speak, when asked, for a patient who is unable for any reason (fear, anxiety, health compromised etc.) to speak for themselves.
- To be an impartial second pair of eyes and ears to assess the patient's situation.
- To listen to both HCP's (healthcare professionals) and the patient in a non-judgmental manner.
- To identify and clarify any issues that arise as care is provided.
- To discuss options/solutions in care concerns with the patient.
- To document all discussion (whether by consult or telephone call).
- To research information.
- To be a role model for professional conduct and respectful of boundaries for both the patient and HCP's.
- To be assertive and speak for the patient where needed.
- To help with written correspondence, phone calls etc.
- To attend appointments where needed.
- To be able to educate/negotiate between HCP's and patient when needed.
- To be a second pair of eyes and ears to assess the patient's situation.
- To provide a balanced, objective and accurate review of events.
- To value, respect and honour the wishes and decisions of the patient who chooses them as an advocate.

When should you consider choosing a Patient Advocate?

Don't wait for a health emergency to happen! Discuss your wishes for care with a trusted person ahead of time. Ask the person you choose if they are willing and able to take on the responsibility. In a health emergency, give your advocate's details to the HCP team. Also, ensure your advocate has the contact information for the HCP team.

Who can be a Patient Advocate?

- A partner, relative, friend or caregiver... **someone you trust.**
- Someone who is reliable, discreet, calm, organized, empathetic, a good listener and communicator, objective and unafraid to ask questions and speak for you when required
- Knows their professional limits
- Respects personal and professional boundaries
- Is a voice of reason
- Empowers and encourages the person who has chosen them to be their advocate.

The challenges of COVID19 from access to treatments, quality and timeliness of care, restrictions on visitation, burnout and shortage of HCP's all means extra vigilance on the part of patients and advocates who find themselves facing a health crisis.

FOR ANYONE GOING INTO A HOSPITAL:

1. Knowledge is POWER. Know the current Health Orders for your province. Understand your rights.
2. Document everything in writing. Contemporaneous notes are evidence. Phone conversations need to then be verified in a follow up email "As per our conversation, on (date), we discussed/agreed upon..." If you can access the medical facility, take a notepad and write everything down or make notes on your phone regarding who you spoke to, when and about what.
3. Ask for details on the diagnosis, test results, procedures, treatment protocols (including experimental treatments), alternative therapies, risk/benefit analysis of medical measures.
4. Always remember prior medical history and ensure that this is being taken into consideration in the treatment plan. What is being done to treat/stabilize other co-morbidities?
5. Call often whether or not you have access in person... giving you access may well be easier for them than fielding continued calls.
6. If your concerns are ignored when you advocate, escalate to a more senior healthcare professional for example, a charge nurse, on the unit. Make sure your concerns target a professional who has the ability to address the issues. Understand that those at certain levels are limited in what they can say/do.
7. Call/submit a formal complaint to Patient Relations if you feel your concerns have been ignored.

ADVOCATE FOR YOUR LOVED ONE AS YOU WOULD WANT THEM TO ADVOCATE FOR YOU!