

Family Involvement in Nursing Homes

Research supports that family involvement during a nursing home stay can help ensure that the facility provides quality care. **But how can a family member get involved in the care of a loved one?** Under the Nursing Home Reform Law of 1987, when a person is admitted to a nursing home, **family members have the right to be involved with the care of their loved one**, unless the resident states that she does not want family involvement. This fact sheet suggests ways family members can be involved in the care of a loved one during a nursing home stay and provides practical tips for family involvement.

Resident Needs and Wishes Come First!

It is important to remember the role of the family member is to always communicate to the nursing home staff your loved one's needs and preferences. This may be different than what you think is best for your loved one, but the resident's needs and wishes should always be respected. Always encourage the resident to express her preferences.

INITIAL FAMILY PARTICIPATION: THE RESIDENT ASSESSMENT AND CARE PLAN

Resident Assessment

The assessment is key to understanding what each resident needs to maintain physical, mental, and social function in a nursing home. The resident must have a comprehensive assessment within 14 days of admission to a nursing home and at least once a year after that or anytime there is significant change in the resident's condition. Resident assessment reviews are completed quarterly. The assessment is used to gather information about the health and physical condition of a resident and also examines her habits, activities, and relationships.

Who conducts a resident assessment?

Typically, an assessment involves: The resident, nursing staff, social services staff, dietary staff, activities staff, and family members.

Tip: Communicating Your Loved One's Story

Introducing your loved one to nursing home staff is one of the most important things you can do. Use the Resident Assessment to communicate personal habits and, most importantly, to share your loved one's unique life story.

Care Plan

Within 7 days of the initial comprehensive assessment, a Care Plan Conference is held. At this conference an individualized care plan is developed by an interdisciplinary team consisting of the attending physician, nurse, nurse aide, activities and dietary staff, and social worker. **It is important that the team have critical input from the resident and/or family members.**

Residents and families should participate in all care planning conferences

All participants discuss the strategy for the resident's care in the Care Plan Conference to ensure all medical and non-medical issues are addressed. Care plan review conferences are held quarterly or whenever there is a major change in a residents' condition to see if the care plan is working or if it needs to be updated.

What is the purpose of the care plan?

The care plan is a strategy for how staff will help a resident on a daily basis. The care plan clarifies what each staff person will do and when they will do it. The care plan serves as a guide for the resident, family members, and staff to discuss the resident's progress.

ON-GOING FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

Visiting

Visits from family members can be important support for a resident's emotional well-being and can help assure your loved one receives quality care. Visits are an important time to look for changes in your loved one's health and mental status. You should see progress towards meeting the goals in the care plan.

When and how can I visit my loved one?

Under the Nursing Home Reform Law of 1987, residents have the right, and the facility must provide for, immediate access to any resident by immediate family or other relatives of the resident, subject to the resident's consent. The resident and family members have the right to decide what visits involve and when they take place. Remember to respect the rights of other residents.

Tips for Visiting Your Loved One

- **Plan your visits around what makes you and your loved one comfortable. For example, you may want to visit at bedtime to help your loved one fall asleep.**
- **Visit at different times of the day and week to see the care your loved one receives at all times.**
- **Keep a guest book in your loved one's room so visitors and family members can communicate with one another.**

Get to Know the Staff

It is important to be familiar with staff members. Know their names and their roles and responsibilities related to resident care.

Who are some of the key staff I should be familiar with?

Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs), RNs and LPNs, Director of Nursing , Director of Social Services, Director of Dietary Services, Administrator. **It is most important to develop a relationship with the CNAs because they are responsible for the direct hands-on work with residents.**

FAMILY ADVOCACY STRATEGIES

Being an advocate for your loved one means: knowing the importance of and participating in the resident assessment and care plan; knowing the nursing home staff and their roles; monitoring your loved one's care during regular visits; and raising any concerns with staff, or if necessary the ombudsman or regulatory agency. You are the primary advocate for your loved one.

When problems arise how can I advocate effectively?

- Document and report concerns and problems to staff members directly involved as soon as they arise. If your actions yield no result, report your concern to staff supervisors in writing and in a meeting.
- Be assertive, confident, and respectful in your interactions with staff. Clearly state your concerns and the outcome you would like.
- Contact your Ombudsman program if your concerns are not being addressed by the facility staff. Your Ombudsman is an advocate for nursing home residents. To find your Ombudsman visit, theconsumervoice.org/get_help.

Advocacy Tip

Every 12-15 months a nursing home that receives Medicaid or Medicare funding will have a state survey conducted by the state licensure and certification agency. The surveyors must post signs announcing that a survey is in progress. When you see a sign make it a point to speak with a member of the survey team about quality of life, quality of care, and resident rights at the facility.

Join with Other Residents' Family Members

The 1987 Nursing Home Reform Law guarantees families of nursing home residents the right to form and hold regular private meetings of an organized group called a Family Council. Joining or organizing a family council is one of the most effective ways to advocate, not just for your loved one, but for quality care for all residents in the nursing home.

What should I know about family councils?

- The facility must provide a meeting space and a designated staff person to act as a liaison between the group and facility.
- Family councils have the right to meet without staff present unless one is invited to allow family members to voice concerns without reservations.
- A family council has the right to take concerns and suggestions about resident care and life in the facility to staff who must act upon the concerns and suggestions and respond to the group.

