



Communicating with Health Care Providers

From the North Shore Caregiver resource Guide, 2015

Roles of Health Care Providers

Effective teamwork requires a mutual understanding of the roles and responsibilities of each member of the team. Regardless of wherever the family caregivers live and whether the care recipient is at home or in a care facility, it is important to get to know the role of each health care professional.

Doctor

Family Physicians typically focus on primary or acute care. Specialists may be necessary if the health concerns are beyond the scope of care and expertise the Family Physician provides.

Registered Nurse

Registered nurses generally assume many different roles, depending on the setting (i.e., care facilities or community care). They may provide hands-on nursing care, supervise care teams, be discharge coordinators, case managers, or hold supervisory or administrative roles.

Social Worker

Social Workers often pay attention to the social and emotional dimensions of care, help problem solve and assist with other non-medical types of concerns.

Community Health Worker

Home Support Workers and Community Health Workers typically provide assistance of a non-medical type in the home such as serving a meal and performing personal tasks such as bathing and incontinence care.

Case Manager

Case Managers work for the health authority and determine, for example, how many hours of home support the care recipient is eligible to receive, as well as whether this will be subsidized. They provide access to other services such as facility care, adult day programs, rehabilitation, home nursing care, and nutrition services.

Discharge Coordinator

These are case managers in the hospital who organize the community supports necessary to discharge clients home safely or assess for residential facility placement from the hospital.

Director of Care

This is the staff person who, in a residential facility, manages each individual resident's care. The director of care typically chairs the case conferences and ensures that the care plans are up to date, in place and reviewed regularly. This person typically has a nursing background.

Resident Care Aide

Performing similar duties to the Community Health Worker, this person works in care facilities. There are usually several care aides assigned to a floor or facility.

Dietician

Dietitians specialize in nutrition and advise people on what to eat in order to meet health goals. Dietitians work in many settings, including hospitals and care facilities.

Occupational and Physical Therapists

Occupational Therapists evaluate the impact of disease on the activities of the patient at home, in facilities and in work situations and then recommend equipment and exercises that can assist. Physical Therapists provide services that help restore function, improve mobility, relieve pain, and limit permanent physical disabilities.

Being Part of the Care Team

At some point as a family caregiver, you will need to work in partnership with members of the health care system to ensure proper care and decisions on behalf of the person receiving care. For example, you will probably have to rely upon health care providers to diagnose and explain the diagnosis and any other acute and chronic problems of the care receiver, and to provide information on options for services and support. When family caregivers and health care professionals work together collaboratively, the care receiver will receive better care. Your insight as a caregiver is invaluable to practitioners, who may not know the person and their needs nearly as well as you do. Caregivers act as advocates for their loved ones by providing knowledge about the care receiver's needs.

The following are some of what family caregivers have to contribute:

Insight into the needs, preferences, and values of the care receiver. Family caregivers often know what the care recipient's preferences and needs are with respect to personal privacy, emotional well-being, and diet, for example. Caregivers also have practical expertise in the day-to-day requirements of the person's care and know how the care receiver reacts to certain types of procedures or treatments.

Insight into family dynamics and cultural/language needs. Caregivers can share information about family dynamics that can help health care practitioners plan practical and realistic care. They can also provide clues regarding more subtle types of behaviour patterns and family history that can help health care practitioners better respond to a care receiver's needs. Caregivers may also be able to help with managing family dynamics that may interfere with the care of the care receiver.