

Advocating in Medical Systems – The Important Role of Nurses

» BY ALICE PAXTON

- In the United States, many people find that healthcare:
- Is slow when you need answers quickly
 - Treats you like just another number
 - Seems like it's a full-time job just to try to understand it

Engaging with a patient healthcare advocate who can ask questions and help a family become more aware of the invisible elements can effectively calm the storm that such questions can stir up.

Advocacy happens at multiple levels. It includes nurses and individual clinicians fighting for a patient's case to professional organizations lobbying for policy changes. Families may not be aware that their loved one's case is part of a larger advocacy push for better access, affordability or quality of care.

Although families are central to medical decision-making, they may not always see the systemic, procedural and advocacy work that underpins care. As a result, patients often share that they feel like "What about me?"

Many times, families have to make decisions under stress with limited time to process complex medical information. Medical systems may not always make this burden visible – the invisible work of absorbing emotional strain, coordinating logistics and navigating insurance is often not acknowledged. An independent health care advocate can help bridge these communication gaps.

Nurses pledge when they graduate to aid the physician in his/her work and devote themselves to the welfare of those committed to their care. Nurses serve a unique role as the bridge between physicians and patients. They are your first choice for a healthcare advocate. Often, they are the first to recognize subtle changes in a patient's condition, allowing them to alert physicians long before those changes become obvious.

As patient advocates, nurses help ensure that individuals receive timely, appropriate and evidence-based care. They also collaborate with physicians and other healthcare professionals to coordinate admissions, transfers and discharges,

ensuring continuity of care throughout the patient's healthcare journey. In the emergency room, the attending physicians place their trust in their patient's nurse to identify risk factors and recognize emergent conditions. Likewise, bedside and long-term care nurses rely on their continuous interactions and firsthand observations to identify changes in a patient's condition and communicate those findings promptly to the healthcare team. These observations are critical to early intervention and improved patient outcomes.

Beyond providing clinical care, nurses fulfill the equally important role of educator and advocate. Through their education and experience, they help patients and their families make informed healthcare decisions. They take the time to reinforce information provided by physicians, explain new treatments and therapies, answer questions and ensure patients and caregivers understand how to safely manage care after discharge.

By providing education and support, the nurses empower patients to take an active role in their own health and families to care for their loved ones.

Nursing is far more than the practice of science and medicine. It is a profession rooted in compassion, advocacy and human connection. Every patient has unique needs, concerns and circumstances. It is the nurse's responsibility to recognize and address those needs while providing safe, compassionate and patient-centered care.

When the wait feels too long, when you want answers quickly, when you feel treated like just another number, when you're trying to understand how your insurance is affected or how you are going to pay for an unexpected trip to the ER or what's the important information on your new medication and all that is encompassed within your doctor's appointment at his office or an unexpected ER visit – look to your nurse who has the education, experience and knowledge to be your advocate and calm the waters.

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Alice Paxton



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