

What Do Patient Health Advocates Do?

By Abbie Leibowitz, M.D. | December 2003

How do patient health advocates impact care delivery? Also called care coordinators, they give employees peace of mind and more time to focus on their jobs, while caring for a family member who needs help navigating the health care system, including long term care. They also give assistance with paperwork, resources, advice and other services.

This saves employers money in the form of productivity and reduces medical bills through efficiency of services. Here are two case studies.

Case Study I

A man called requesting help to find senior care for his elderly mother who lives out of state, has a complex medical condition and a long history of psychiatric care. At the suggestion of the caller, the advocate spoke with two of the member's sisters who were able to provide further information on the mother's condition and prior course of treatment.

Working with the healthcare providers, social worker and family members, the advocate then helped the family find the appropriate home healthcare and, subsequently, a nursing home for Alzheimer's patients for their mother.

As of this writing, the advocate had logged four hours helping the family with senior care issues, providing peace of mind for the family and saving the employer well over the four hours in lost productivity that the member would have needed to accomplish the same tasks.

Case Study II

A man called requesting assistance for his college-aged son who was in the hospital after suffering a severe traumatic brain injury. The parents were receiving little information from the

hospital staff on how to deal or communicate with their son.

The advocate suggested that the parents request a meeting with the hospital caregivers and trauma unit caseworker. In preparation for the meeting, the advocate worked with the parents to develop a list of specific questions and encouraged them to request a future treatment plan.

After their son was transferred to an inpatient brain injury rehab center, the parents called back expressing concern about their son's care. They cited several incidences in which their son fell while being assisted from bathroom to bed and was not wearing the helmet as prescribed in his treatment plan.

The advocate contacted the patient's health plan to determine which rehab hospitals were in network, researched and reviewed the options and presented them to the patient's parents. Unfortunately, prior to moving the patient to the new rehab center, the patient's condition necessitated a transfer back to the hospital for surgery. After surgery, the patient was transferred to the new inpatient brain injury rehab facility and eventually transitioned to an outpatient rehab center.

The advocate worked with the health plan, kept in touch with the rehab facility and made the necessary calls, helping to alleviate the parents' anxiety, facilitating the care of their son. This saved the employer and the parents (both of whom work outside of the home) countless hours of employee productivity that would otherwise have been lost.

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