

Tips On Becoming An Effective Advocate For Care

(NAPSA)—For people presently caring for loved ones, or who may soon be in such a position, it is important to know where to turn for information and assistance. If you must act on behalf of a family member with physicians and other health care professionals, insurance companies, hospitals, nursing homes and home health care agencies, there are many resources and guidelines that can help you advocate for him or her and alleviate an often stressful situation.

Medical Advances and Longer Lives

Extraordinary advances in medical care allow people with significant health problems and disabilities to extend their lives for many more years than ever dreamed possible. Additionally, nursing, therapy, social and psychological services and community-based programs have been created to assist the disabled and their family caregivers.

Yet despite the many changes in how people receive care, caregivers often experience stress and frustration in trying to obtain adequate help and care for their loved ones. For caregivers, being an advocate is one of the most important—and, often, most challenging—roles they will assume.

Tips for Caregivers

To help yourself be an effective advocate for someone you care about, consider the following general guidelines, which can be applied in many caregiving situa-

Internet Resources For Caregivers

- Eldercare Locator, www.eldercare.gov.
- American Bar Association Commission on Law and Aging, www.abanet.org/aging.
- Family Caregiver Alliance, www.caregiver.org.
- Family Caregiving 101, www.familycaregiving101.org.
- National Alliance for Caregiving, www.caregiving.org.
- National Family Caregivers Association, www.thefamilycaregiver.org.
- National Institute on Aging, www.niapublications.org.



tions and care settings:

1. Learn what questions to ask and be prepared. Decide what information is most important to you and ask those questions first. Write down your questions prior to any conversation. Write down the responses you receive as well.

2. Be persistent and follow up. Multiple phone calls and sometimes letters or e-mails may be required to get the information you need. Do not give up. Repeated attempts do produce results.

3. Determine your strengths as a caregiver and the strengths of your family member. What things can you realistically do and what activities can the person you are helping perform? After you decide what each of you can do, determine what kind of help you need from others.

4. Develop a plan of action. To get what you need, take one step at a time. Set realistic goals. Each piece of information you receive helps in the decision-making process.

5. Form a care team. Your team can include health care workers, volunteers, members of your faith community, family, friends and others. Recognize that help comes in many forms.

6. Do not compare yourself to any other caregivers. Some emotions, frustrations and satisfactions of caregiving are experienced by many caregivers but each caregiving relationship is unique. Caregivers' abilities, responsibilities, personal feelings, cultural expectations, mental and physical health, finances and overall circumstances vary markedly. Give yourself credit for what you are doing.

Additional Information Is Available

One good source of information is a free booklet from the MetLife Mature Market Institute called "Becoming an Effective Advocate for Care." It's part of the "Since You Care" series of guides created in cooperation with the National Alliance for Caregiving. It includes advice, resources and checklists. You can get a copy by calling (203) 221-6580, e-mailing maturemarketinstitute@metlife.com, visiting www.maturemarketinstitute.com or writing to: MetLife Mature Market Institute, 57 Greens Farms Road, Westport, CT 06880.