

**Involving Family Members in the Treatment of an Ill Relative
Information from <http://www.schizophrenia.com>, and from schizophrenia.com members'
personal experiences**

Frequently family members lack specific knowledge of the process used by staff in working with hospitalized patients. They generally know a psychiatrist and other staff are involved and each patient has a record or chart. Knowledge of staff roles, what the chart contains and how treatment goals are arrived at, however, is often limited. Many family members have never attended a meeting to discuss their relative and some are unaware that with the consent of the adult patient, involvement is permitted.

In most states whenever an adult patient is hospitalized meetings must be held periodically to review and discuss treatment goals and plans for that patient. These meetings are usually referred to as "treatment meetings" or "treatment review meetings" or "treatment planning meetings".

At some hospitals staff may omit inviting family members to participate in treatment planning meetings. It is thus important for family members to take action if they are interested in attending.

Confidentiality Issues:

Before requesting involvement in treatment plans, it is important that hospital staff have clearance to discuss your relative's condition with you. Current confidentiality laws prevent doctors from speaking with anyone other than the patient (assuming the patient is a legal adult), unless the patient gives their official permission with a HIPPA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) compliancy form. It can be absolutely essential for another person (a family member, primary caretaker, etc) to be informed of treatment decisions, especially because so many people with schizophrenia have very little insight into their own illness. Getting confidentiality clearance ahead of time can prevent many battles in the future over treatment compliance.

How to request involvement in treatment planning meetings:

- a) Phone the hospital social worker or other staff member on the ward where your relative is residing. Request permission to attend the "treatment planning" meetings.
- b) Write a letter to the hospital expressing your interest in attending the meetings. Request that the letter be placed in the patient's record.
- c) Request that the hospital inform you **IN WRITING** of the time, date and place of each of

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meeting.

d) Request that the hospital explain any reasons why your attendance cannot/should not be allowed. (Reasons: patient will not allow; psychiatrist feels it is in appropriate and has explained to you why IN WRITING.)

e) Request any particular staff members you would like to attend the treatment planning meetings. (Generally the psychiatrist, nurse and social worker are present at the meetings. Sometimes, however, this does not occur, thus if you wish a particular person present, inform the hospital in your letter.

---Sample letter to inform the psychiatric hospital (or medical hospital that has a psychiatric unit) that you are interested in being invited to Treatment Planning meetings.

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Quality Care Psychiatric Center Ill Psych Lane Anywhere, NY DATE _____

Attention: Mr. John Smith, Social Worker

Dear Mr. Smith:

I wish to take this opportunity to inform you of my interest in attending the Treatment Planning meetings regarding my son, XYZ Bauer, who is currently on unit 22 at your hospital. I would appreciate being informed in writing of the time and place of the meetings several days in advance so that I can make arrangements to attend.

My address is 111 Hopeful Lane, Anywhere, NY. I can be reached at 111 -111 during the day (9:00 to 5:00) and at 111-222 after six o'clock. I would like to request that this letter be placed in my son's chart to alert other staff of my interest, should (Son/Daughter Name) be transferred to another unit. I appreciate all you are doing for my son.

Thank you for your assistance with this matter. If there are any difficulties with this request, please phone me at your earliest convenience.

Very truly yours,

Communicating Effectively with Doctors and Hospital Staff:

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More ideas from schizophrenia.com family members—

1) **Make sure the doctor/psychiatrist is aware of all the symptoms** - if they don't have all the information, they might be led to an incorrect diagnosis or treatment plan. Keeping a symptom journal with a list of your relative's worrisome behaviors, actions, moods, and statements is the most thorough and accurate way to do this. This is also a good place to document reactions to various medications and other treatments – how effective they are, and what side effects they cause (if any).

2) **Become familiar with the treating psychiatrist, the nurses at the hospital, the social workers, and anyone else directly involved with your relative's care.** These are the people who should have your loved one's best interests and welfare at heart, and the people you should go to if you have questions, concerns, or complaints.

3) **Be assertive** - you have every right to know what is going on, and have things explained to you in a way you understand - **but be polite and flexible also.** Too many times hospital staff get impatient with "problem" family members who they see as rude or demanding. It's vital to have a good working relationship with the treatment team.

4) **Be polite but persistent in your quest to get information and answers.** Hospital staff members are inevitably busy, but they are there to give the best care possible to consumers and their family. Keep your conversations and requests short and to the point, to maximize the time they have for you. If they are unable to see you, leave a message with your name, your relative's name, and your number, and keep the phone line clear so they can reach you at the first opportunity. Consider putting your question or request in a letter, and delivering it to their office. Remember to write down things you appreciate - special considerations or care that you or your relative received from a care provider - as well as concerns.

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