

10 Tips for Being a Health Advocate

1



Understand the medical team

Seniors may be managing multiple health conditions with the help of numerous doctors, nurses and specialists. Communication between those teams isn't often clear. As a healthcare advocate, it's important to keep a record of what each provider says, does and prescribes, and to make sure all parties communicate.

2



Understand the current medicine regimen

Work with your loved one to gather all prescription medications, nonprescription drugs, vitamins and supplements; and keep an up-to-date list of all medication names, exact dosages, expiration dates and prescribing doctors. Consult with your loved one's pharmacist to ensure prescribed medications do not interact negatively with each other and that there are no duplicates; and ensure that each medical provider is aware of all prescribed medications. Understanding the potential side effects of prescription medications and nonprescription drugs is encouraged in case there is an adverse reaction. It is also recommended to use one pharmacy instead of multiple.

3



File a HIPAA authorization form

The Health Information Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) prevents medical professionals from discussing an individual's health information with anyone but that individual (or their legal guardian if under the age of 18). Health providers must obtain a signed HIPAA authorization form before a patient's protected health information can be shared with other individuals. Contact all medical providers and request to add a HIPAA authorization form in their medical records for anyone who may act as a healthcare advocate.

4



Put in place a healthcare power of attorney

A healthcare power of attorney (POA) allows your loved one to designate a person who can make medical care and treatment decisions on your loved one's behalf in the event they become incapacitated. Putting in place a healthcare POA is straightforward, but requirements vary by state. Contact an estate planning or elder law attorney to assist with the preparation of a healthcare POA.



5



Attend doctor and other health-related appointments

Having a second set of eyes and ears at any appointment is key to understanding the overall care plan for your loved one. Whether the appointment is in person or virtual, having someone there as a healthcare advocate to ask questions and understand the care management plan is extremely helpful to your loved one.

6



Have your list ready

Spend time before a healthcare appointment creating a health status update. Ahead of the appointment, gather information from your loved one that consists of a current health status update, questions about care or medication, or concerns regarding symptoms or treatment plans. Use that information to create a list of questions or comments for the health professional at the next scheduled appointment.

7



Keep a personal healthcare journal

Medical visits can feel overwhelming to both you and your loved one. Taking notes during each appointment and keeping a written record of the care journey helps ensure you have a clear understanding of what was prescribed and that nothing is forgotten.

8



Understand the health conditions

It is also important that everyone has a clear understanding of the doctor's explanations and instructions. Continue to ask follow-up questions until there is a clear understanding of what is being said.

9



Have a Plan B

Life happens to all of us, so make sure there is always a Plan B person for any appointment you are scheduled to attend. Designating who that Plan B person is may require additional paperwork or documentation so they can attend appointments with your loved one.

10



Make sure home is as safe as can be

Nine out of 10 of our aging population want to age safely in their home, wherever that home may be. An important part of being a health advocate is making sure the home is a safe environment. After understanding what the care plan is, the key to success is ensuring the environment is conducive to aging in place safely, including making sure the medications are clearly labeled and easily accessible.

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