

Get the Care You Deserve

How to Survive a Medical Crisis

By Kathy Pendleton

BEFORE THE CRISIS:

Set up your role as an advocate in advance

1. Get the agreement of your family members
2. Collect medical documents (DNR, Powers of Attorney if necessary, whatever specifies their wishes) for each family member.
3. Clarify how you will help each person. Will you:
 - a. Speak for them or not?
 - b. Be present during doctor's exams or not?
 - c. Be present during doctor's discussion or not?
 - d. Ask additional clarifying questions or not?
 - e. Who will speak for them if they can't speak for themselves (i.e. unconscious, groggy)?
4. Know the hospitals and doctors where the patient's medical insurance is accepted. It's your/their responsibility!

Collect medical history (to take with you) for each family member

1. Current doctors, their specialties and contact information
2. Current medications and dosage information
3. Current pharmacies, addresses and phone numbers
4. Current medical illnesses and conditions being treated for
5. Past surgeries, the dates, reasons, and results
6. Any allergies!!!!
7. Any supplements, vitamins, minerals, or over the counter (non-prescription) medications regularly consumed
8. Family disease/condition histories, i.e. stroke, heart disease, cancer, diabetes, etc.

DUING THE CRISIS:

Recognize that your family member is having a medical crisis

1. Do they feel worse than they've ever felt?
2. Check the First Aid ABC's:

- a. Airway open—mouth and throat clear of debris (food, gum, candy, etc.)
 - b. Breathing—chest moving up and down, or feel air movement with hand or cheek
 - c. Circulation—can you find a pulse?
3. Have they lost consciousness, even for a little while?
 4. Do they have severe and unrelenting pain somewhere in their body?
 5. Have they had a high fever for a number of days?
 6. Are they bleeding in a way that is difficult to control?
 7. Has a body part changed?
 - a. Swollen
 - b. Bent the wrong way
 - c. The wrong color—purple, grey, yellowish, etc.
 8. This list is incomplete. If you think they should have medical attention, attempt to convince them to go to the ER or the doctor's office.
 9. Take the medical records with you to the ER or the doctor's office.
 10. Go to a hospital or doctor where their insurances is accepted (know this ahead of time).

COMMUNICATING WITH HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

Hospital Admission/Registration - Ensure that the information given during admissions/registration is complete and accurate

1. Registration personnel are typically not medically trained.
2. To be certain of insurance coverage, know and follow the necessary insurance procedures.
 - a. Call the phone number on the insurance card.
 - b. Get an approval number if possible.
 - c. Get the name of the person you speak with.
3. If your relative is awake and alert, allow them to speak for themselves.
4. This registration interview is about insurance, current doctors, and the primary reason you've come to Emergency.
5. Follow along with the conversation and compare it to the notes/information you already have.
6. Information about the regular doctors, pharmacy, and medications/supplements taken is important and needs to be accurate and complete.
7. Ensure that any allergies are recorded in the medical record.
8. Ask whether there is a document that needs to be signed for you to act as a patient advocate, and have the patient sign it.

Initial Medical Interview – Ensure that information is complete and accurate.

1. This interview is typically with a medically trained person.
2. If your relative is awake and alert, allow them to speak for themselves.
3. This interview is about their current condition and medical history.
4. If they forget to mention things that you've heard them say, ask them "What about this ... ?"

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5. The Emergency Department is usually busy, and you may need to:
 - a. Answer a question more than once.
 - b. Review information about allergies.
 - c. Review information about medications and supplements.
6. Ensure that any questions you have at this point are asked, or anything you think is important gets mentioned.
7. Take care not to overstep the boundaries and independence of your family member.
8. Ensure that any allergies are mentioned.

As the advocate, be attentive to the needs and condition of your relative while waiting.

1. Waiting is a part of the Emergency Room experience.
2. If you have the option, check and go to the ER waiting times are shorter.
3. Take a sweater or wrap with you. The emergency room is often cool.
4. If your relative becomes cold, ask for a blanket.
5. If your relative becomes worse while waiting, or they can't sit up, or they're going to vomit, immediately ask at the desk for assistance.

Keep records of everything that goes on during the examination and testing in the ER or doctor's office.

1. Remember that Emergency is busy, so be sure that:
 - a. Information the doctor receives during the discussion is complete and accurate.
 - b. Allergies are reported again. It's better to be safe than sorry, even if it seems like you're repeating yourself.
2. Take a notebook or tablet with you to the hospital or doctor's office to write down everything that happens. You may be asked about this information later by another doctor.
 - a. Any medications given.
 - b. Any tests performed and the results.
 - c. Any conclusions given by the doctor.
 - d. Answers to any questions asked.
3. Ask if you can record the conversation in order to remember the doctor's instructions. Some doctors will allow it and then you'll be able to review it later to clear up any differences in understanding. Each person will remember a situation differently!
4. Ask about any medications that will be given, and speak up if you believe that it shouldn't be taken or administered. Better safe than sorry.

FOLLOWUP AND BILLING

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Before leaving, get a written copy of all tests, results, treatment plans.

1. Get a written copy of the ER records in order to:
 - a. Remember what happened later.
 - b. Discuss the medication and treatment prescribed.
 - c. Compare it to bills that arrive weeks later.
 - d. If at all possible, take the time to do this step.
2. Compare the official record with your written record.
 - a. Note any differences
 - b. Call the hospital to discuss the differences.

Billing

1. Compare the bill with the official record and with your written records.
2. Call the hospital to discuss any differences.
3. Check the insurance receipt of what was paid.
4. Follow up with the insurance company for anything that was denied.
 - a. Ask the reason it was denied.
 - b. Ask what you must provide for them to cover it.
5. If you get continued insurance denials, you can:
 - a. Discuss the problem with the hospital insurance liaison.
 - b. Discuss the problem with the insurance company customer ombudsman.
 - c. Be persistent.

Follow up the Emergency Room visit with a visit to your regular physician.

1. Visit your regular doctor to discuss the ER visit so that it is in their records.
2. Discuss any new medications from the ER with your regular doctor.
3. Discuss the treatment given in the ER with your regular doctor.

About Kathy Pendleton



After more than 25 years as a technical trainer with various computer software companies, Kathy has directed her analytical fervor toward healthcare solutions through patient advocacy.

Kathy's anguish and numerous frustrations during the extended hospitalizations and recoveries of her own family have convinced her that errors occur regularly, although not maliciously. Her business teaches people what they need to do to effectively manage their own health care and the health care of their families.

She is especially passionate about healthcare on our own terms and avoiding hospital mistakes. Her fifteen years of experience in watching, helping, and asking endless questions during the time her family members have spent in hospitals has strengthened her belief that:

1. No one cares more about your own health than you do
2. We must take responsibility for ourselves and our families to ensure that we avoid hospital errors
3. While doctors have years of training and experience in medical knowledge, we have even more years of experience and knowledge of our own bodies.

Kathy is a best-selling author and educator. She enjoys travel, cooking and spending time with her family and friends in homes near Lake Tahoe and in South Florida.