EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT VISITS FOR PERSONS WITH DEMENTIA

Just-in-Time Tip Sheet for Caregivers

Introduction

People with Alzheimer's disease and other related dementias (ADRD) can struggle during visits to the emergency department (ED). The hectic and unfamiliar environment can make them feel anxious and confused.

Just-in-Time

This ***Just-in-Time*** tip sheet is designed to help caregivers communicate effectively with ED staff. By asking the right questions and having important information ready, caregivers can play a vital role in improving the care of individuals with ADRD in the ED. Remember, you're an important part of the care team!

Communication with Emergency Department (ED) Staff

1. **When talking to the ED staff, let them know right away that your loved one has dementia**. Give them some info on what stage they're in (early, middle, advanced) and any vital details about how they communicate and understand things.

   It's also helpful to share any phrases or words staff can use to make your loved one feel validated and understood. And don't forget to ask the staff to pass this info along during shift changes.

2. **Make sure to confirm your relationship with your loved one** (husband, wife, partner, family member, friend) and let the surgery staff know if you'll be leaving and when you'll be back.

3. **Mention aids the person uses (glasses, hearing aids, dentures, cane, walker)** and request that they be available before and after any medical procedures. If possible, keep possession of expensive equipment like hearing aids or custom durable medical equipment when the patient isn't using them.

4. **Explain daily activities where the person may need extra help** (eating, bathing, toileting, walking) and share any tips that work for you with the bedside staff.

Communication Tips

As a key member of the care team for someone with ADRD, don't be afraid to ask medical providers to slow down if they're talking too fast or if you're feeling confused. Let them know if you're having trouble hearing or understanding. This will help you better understand the care being given so you can be sure your loved one is well taken care of.

If you're feeling overwhelmed or unsure about caring for them at home, reach out to a discharge planner, hospital ombudsman, or patient advocate for help and advice.

Remember, you're not alone in your caregiving journey!

Critical Questions to Ask ED Staff

Will you fill me in on what medical tests or procedures you have planned for the person with ADRD?

Additional Things to Say: It would be very helpful to know what to expect. I can share some triggers (some things that cause someone to feel upset and frightened) that could cause challenging behaviors to avoid if possible.

How long do you think the tests/procedures will take, and which ED staff will be handling them?

Additional Things to Say: It would be great to have an idea of how long my family member will be in the ED and to learn how you handle caring for someone with dementia in this environment.

Can you tell me what information about the person with ADRD can be shared with me?

Additional Things to Say: I understand patient confidentiality but also know that it would be helpful for me to be aware of evaluation and treatment plans.

Do you think the person with ADRD will be able to go home, or will they need to be admitted to the hospital?

Additional Things to Say: I know it might be hard to say right now, but when you do know, please let me know. Also, speak slowly so I can write everything down or permit me to record what you are saying, which would be helpful. (Note: If there is something ED staff tells you that you don't understand, don't hesitate to ask them to explain it.)

Additional Information Caregivers Should Have on Hand to Share with Hospital Staff

- A brown bag containing all medication bottles or a medication list with information on when and how to take each medication for a person with ADRD.
- List of allergies.
- List of other health conditions (such as diabetes, congestive heart failure, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and psychiatric conditions) and how the person is managing them.
- Insurance information.
- Primary care physician's name and phone number, advance directives, and signed POLST form.
- Name and number of caregiver and other emergency (ICE) contacts.

Help ED staff understand what matters most from the person's perspective. If the person could communicate with the staff, what would they want to tell them? Helping the care team confirms that you want to make their job easier and that you are part of the care team.

What Should I Know About Discharge from the ED?

Before the person with ADRD is discharged, be sure to ask questions so you understand the diagnosis and the plan. For example:

- What is the diagnosis, and what does it mean?
- Are there any new medications or care that have to start upon discharge? When are they given and how?
- Are there any new medical devices I need to learn to use before going home?
- What should I look for at home and do if something is concerning?
- When is the next follow-up appointment?

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