HOSPITALIZATION FOR PERSONS WITH DEMENTIA

Just-in-Time Tip Sheet for Caregivers

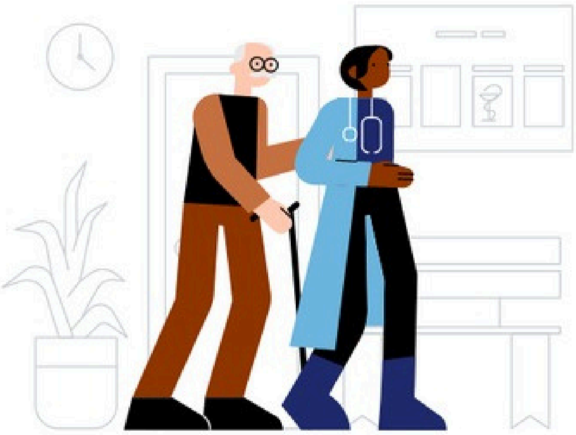
Family Caregiver Alliance®

Introduction

Having Alzheimer's disease or related dementias (ADRD) can sometimes mean a trip to the hospital for the individual with ADRD, whether it's directly related to their condition or not. Hospitals can be really confusing and stressful places for persons with ADRD, and as a result they may feel overwhelmed and disoriented.

Just-in-Time

To help caregivers navigate this challenging situation, we've put together this handy ***Just-in-Time*** tip sheet with communication tips for talking to hospital staff. By recognizing caregivers as key members of the person with ADRD's care team, we can improve the quality of care of these individuals during hospital stays.



Vital Information to Communicate with Hospital Staff

1. **Let the hospital staff know that your loved one has dementia,** approximately what stage of the disease they're in (early, middle, advanced), and any other important details.

   Share how the person you care for communicates, their level of understanding, and the best way to interact with them to avoid confusion. Be sure to ask staff to pass this info on to the next shift.

2. **Make sure the hospital staff knows your relationship to the person** and when you'll be back if you have to leave.

3. **Mention any aids your loved one needs,** like glasses or a walker, and ask for them to be available before and after any procedures. Keep a close eye on expensive items like hearing aids or custom durable medical equipment.

4. **Explain any daily activities your loved one might need help with,** like eating or walking, and share with staff tips that work for you.

Communication Tips

As an essential member of the person's care team, you can ask medical providers to slow down if they are speaking too fast or if things are happening to the person you don't understand. Let staff know if you are experiencing hearing difficulties or other impairments. This way, you can better understand the care being provided and ensure the well-being of the person in your care.

If you have additional concerns or are worried that you cannot care for the person at home, ask to speak to a discharge planner, hospital ombudsman, or patient advocate to discuss your options.

Critical Questions to Ask Hospital Staff

Some hospitalizations are planned while others happen because of an unexpected health emergency. It's a good idea to ask the hospital team taking care of your loved one these important questions.

What tests and procedures are scheduled for the person with ADRD, and who will be performing them?

If the hospital team doesn't go over the details of tests and procedures, don't hesitate to ask the nurse or doctor in charge to walk you through the process. Knowing how they will be carried out and by which staff is important. It allows you to tell the healthcare team about the preferences and behaviors of the person with ADRD that only you may be aware of, like what helps them stay calm or how they might react in new situations. You can also point out any triggers (some things that cause someone to feel upset and frightened) that could lead to challenging behaviors and suggest ways to manage them.

If anesthesia is part of the procedure, will it affect the person's cognitive function? If so, what steps can the healthcare team take to minimize these effects?

Bringing up this concern early on allows the anesthesiologist and medical team to explain the type of anesthesia they will use and how they will treat potential cognitive side effects (changes in thinking, understanding, reasoning) or delirium (a temporary, treatable change in mental abilities). It also gives them a chance to ask you for additional information about the person with ADRD that could be helpful to know.

How does the healthcare team help manage pain for someone with ADRD who can't communicate it?

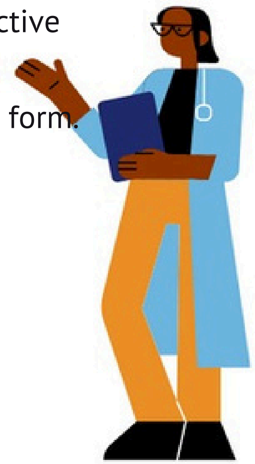
Pain is different for everyone, and it can be hard for people with ADRD to express it. They might yell, groan, or show other signs of discomfort. The healthcare team can use medication or other treatments like repositioning or massage to help. Caregivers play a big role in advocating for the person's pain management, so make sure to share any important information with the healthcare team that can help them address your loved one's pain.

What info about the person with ADRD can you tell me?

Hospital staff respect patient privacy and confidentiality but will try to find an authorized decision-maker to share important info with, for example, a Durable Power of Attorney (DPOA) agent. Because caregivers are a vital link in the information chain, it's important to share relevant legal documents and information with staff. For more info on DPOA and other legal documents go to Family Caregiver Alliance: www.caregiver.org.

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.



What should I know about discharge from the hospital?

Before a person with ADRD is discharged home or to another care setting ask staff:

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

If the person is being transferred to another floor in the hospital or to another facility, ask about their diagnosis, care plan, and how long they will be there. Stay informed and be prepared!

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