

Supporting Your Loved One Through a Psychiatric Hospitalization

The One Pager

Has your loved one recently been admitted to a psychiatric hospital/unit or do you anticipate an upcoming hospitalization? Have this ready!

Individuals living with psychiatric illnesses, particularly those who are experiencing psychosis, are often not good historians. In order for our loved ones to get the best possible psychiatric treatment, it is important for the treating psychiatrist to have an accurate history. Even if there is not a release for hospital staff to share information with you, HIPAA does allow them to receive information from you.

Consider writing a “one pager”. We have received excellent feedback from doctors and family members that having this information has been a “game changer”.

What to write:

Put the individual’s full name and date of birth at the top of the page.

Under that, write “Please put this in (*person’s name*) medical record”.

On one page, neatly organized and easy to read, consider including the following information, depending on what is most relevant to the situation of your loved one.

- Initial diagnosis, date, symptoms
- Subsequent treatment and diagnoses
 - Psychiatrists
 - Therapists
 - Medications (what worked & what did not work)
- Hospitalizations- where and when (*There is no central database of hospitalizations or medications*)
- When discharged from the hospitalizations, were they stable?
- How much time between hospitalizations? ie: 6 in the past year or none for 5 years?
- Once discharged from an acute hospitalization, do they continue taking medications that were prescribed? If not, why? (ie: side effects, thought they were poison, did not believe they were ill, etc)
- Has this person had any prolonged periods of stability? Stable work history/family? If so, what meds/treatment were they receiving during that time?
- Is there a history of violence or threats of violence towards themselves or others?
- Is there a history of leaving the area/state?
- Is there a history of incarceration as a result of mental health symptoms?
- Any medical issues? ie: diabetes, heart disease, autoimmune disorders, etc.
- Any drug or alcohol use? If so, frequency and duration.
- Any medical marijuana/THC use? If so, frequency and duration.

What is the family’s hope for this hospitalization? Can the individual return home? If yes, under what conditions (ie: lucid and no longer violent)? Or is the request for discharge to a residential program? Short term residential treatment (SRT)? State hospital? Etc.

State your relationship as a family member/friend. Give your contact information and offer to provide additional information if it would be helpful.

Call the hospital and get the FAX number of the unit where the individual has been placed. You may consider FAXing the document to the ER when they are initially taken there, and then again to the unit where they are placed. FAX is considered secure. If you do not have the ability to FAX, Staples and Office Depot have that capability.

Ongoing

Ideally, your loved one will sign a release so you can get updates and share information. Not infrequently, there is a situation of distrust, and our loved ones will not sign a release for us.

Some suggestions:

Call and speak to the discharge planner. Even without a release, they can get information from you. They just cannot give you information. You may want to inform them that if the discharge plan is for your loved one to “come home” to your house, you will only allow this if you are involved in the discharge plan/discussions. This may prompt the staff to encourage your loved one to sign a release for you.

Take telephone calls from your loved one. Every hospital is required to have a phone available to the patients. Take notes/date/time. How does your loved one sound? Are they irrational? Threatening harm to self or others? Making plans that are not in their best interest? This information can be shared with the clinical staff, via FAX to the unit where your loved one is located. Make sure to include their name, date of birth, and a request to place the information in the medical file. Include your name, relationship, and contact information.

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The Florida Mental Health Advocacy Coalition is pleased to share this helpful guide prepared by Marsha Martino, former Executive Director of NAMI Palm Beach and a Founding Board Member of FLMHAC.