

## **QUALITY OF LIFE IN LONG-TERM CARE**

### **Advocacy and Problem Solving are Powerful Tools**

**By Kathy Bradley**

As discussed in a previous article, a thorough and well-written care plan, implemented consistently by well-trained staff, is the best tool to assure quality care and to prevent problems.

Family representatives are members of the care plan team. Care planning is an ongoing process of assessment, planning and implementation. Family members should provide information throughout all three of these phases. The care team, including family representatives, should take the time needed to fully discuss your loved one's needs and preferences about their care. This includes their daily routine, interests and personal history, including any changes you have noticed. Sharing your successes and challenges in providing care and tips for what or doesn't work is crucial. Unfortunately, some facilities prefer brief and cursory planning meetings, relegating the family to a passive role. Advocates may need to take the lead to ensure in-depth discussions occur.

Staff insights, successes and tips are just as valuable as those of the family members. Each person has a different relationship with the care recipient, and what works for one may not work for another. Incorporating staff tips and successes into the care plan is essential. Working in partnership with staff can be a significant asset in advocating for the best care and quality of life for your loved one.

#### **Documentation**

Regularly reviewing the provider's records of your loved one's care is crucial to ensure the care plan is implemented consistently and that documentation supports their needs. It's important to establish that you will be given access to these records upon request. The care recipient and their legal power of attorney are granted this access by law. If you do not have legal power of attorney, your loved one or their legal power of attorney can grant you access. It is best to establish this right in writing, in the care plan, and with any other forms the provider may require, as early as possible. Taking this step makes your advocacy much more powerful.

#### **Daily Activity**

In addition to a regular review of records, you should observe various activities throughout the times of day and days of the week as they are scheduled and inquire about your loved one's participation. Any time you notice a change in your loved one, you can request a care plan update. If something in the plan isn't working, ask for a revision. Don't feel intimidated by the educational degrees, certifications and licenses of the staff. They know their field of study, but YOU know your loved one. You are an essential member of the team. What works on paper, in the textbooks or according to statistics doesn't necessarily translate to success with your unique loved one.

## Problem Solving

All this preparation and teamwork will not prevent problems from arising, but will establish a positive working relationship for handling issues that will inevitably occur. Problems that are not addressed will likely get bigger, more complicated — and worse. Use the care plan as a tool for brainstorming and resolving problems. The plan must be updated every 3 to 6 months, depending on the care setting, but problems may arise much sooner. THAT is the time to request a care team meeting — not some arbitrary date on a calendar. In fact, the same regulations that require the periodic plan update also require a care plan meeting be held any time there is a significant change in the status of the person receiving care, or upon request of the consumer or family representative.

## The Bottom Line

The care plan, and the process of developing, revising and refining it, are powerful tools for setting up the best care and quality of life for your loved one. However, the plan must be implemented properly, consistently and competently by all who work with your loved one.

If it becomes evident that rapport and teamwork with staff do not resolve the problem, other advocacy steps are available and appropriate to take your efforts further. A quick reference to several steps in this process is available in a previous **Reverse** article, “Nine Steps to Empowered Advocacy”. Justice In Aging has developed an essential guide, [25 Common Nursing Home Problems – & How to Resolve Them](#), which provides practical tips for many scenarios.

For other specific assistance for individual situations no charge, please contact me at [Our Mother’s Voice](#).