

## Patient Advocacy Explained by Linda Garvin

Our current health care system is fragmented and plagued with multiple problems. It can be difficult for physicians on your medical care team to have the necessary and complete picture of your important health conditions and medical needs.

This is where a private health advocate can help you with the lack of communication, impersonal care and the overwhelming amount of medical information you receive from various health care providers.

### **What is a health advocate?**

A health advocate does not provide hands on medical care, such as administering injections, taking blood pressures or changing bandages. A health advocate is an individual who provides direct and personalized services to a patient and their family as they navigate the healthcare system. An advocate may have a medical, nursing or social worker background with several years of medical experience or have graduated from an advocacy program.

Health advocates may also specialize in particular areas. For example, some may help you with medical billing; assist with acute or chronic diagnoses, mental health services and/or pain management. Some private advocates work with individuals facing a cancer diagnosis. In this instance, an advocate can provide guidance and support particularly when facing critical decision making.

An advocate working with cancer patients can assist you in understanding your disease and what it means, help you prepare for your various medical appointments, provide safety tips for planned surgical procedures and hospitalizations. An advocate can also communicate with your health care needs to your medical team and exchange information with family members, just to name a few.

### **How can a health advocate help you?**

Guide you in finding the appropriate physician and care team.

Help you prepare for physician appointments by working with you to develop an agenda for each meeting to make sure you get your questions answered.

Assist you in securing a second or third opinion.

Review medical records.

If needed, Identifying pathways of care from hospitalization to home health care.

Create questions for your cancer team to support your understanding of your illness, explaining various testing, scans and blood work that may be ordered and treatments options

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so you can make an informed decision about your care.

Help you learn about your diagnosis, research your treatment options and provide valuable resources.

Assist in developing a personalized care plan.

Make home and hospital visits.

Assist with discharge planning.

If needed support and educate you with end of life planning.

Help a family make decisions for a loved one who needs health-related assistance.

### **The benefits and value of hiring a private patient advocate?**

Providing individuals the pros and cons of recommended treatment options so one can choose the best options for themselves.

Communicate your needs to your physicians and family members.

Save valuable time.

Assist in doing research on your diagnosis, identify physicians that have experience with your particular illness and help develop an action plan.

Help prevent health crises and unnecessary hospitalizations.

Since your physician may stay within their own network for referrals, an advocate can reach out outside of this network for options on providers and hospitals that may be of additional benefit for your specific diagnosis.

An advocate's allegiance is with you. Although hospitals may have an ombudsman or an advocate, if you run into a problem with the hospital or a particular physician, their first allegiance is to the facility paying their salary.

The value of having someone by your side to help you manage your life becomes priceless with a difficult diagnosis like cancer. An advocate can work closely with you to make sure decisions are being made that reflect your goals and comfort level.

**How would I know when it is time to hire a health advocate?**

When you are uncertain and scared about your diagnosis.

If you need someone to steer you in the correct direction.

When making decisions in a timely manner is important, the value of having a health advocate on your side to facilitate important conversations and help you prioritize and organize what needs to be done can be invaluable.

When you feel powerless to coordinate what needs to be done.

**What to look for when hiring a private health advocate?**

Professional background prior to becoming an advocate.

Years of experience working as a health advocate.

The types of cases an advocate has had experiences working with.

Reviewing an advocate's web site for detailed information.

Review patient testimonials on their web site or on goggle.

Check to see if any health articles have been written by an individual advocate that could show their understanding of working with particular clients.

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*Linda prepared these materials about private  
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*One of Linda's articles, "Helpful Tips on Being  
Supportive to a Friend or Loved One With Cancer"  
was published by Beatcancer.org and is also on her  
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