Identification of Informal Support

Help and support from family members, neighbors and community groups is important when an older adult is leaving a nursing facility. As a caregiver, become involved with the nursing facility’s discharge process and get to know other volunteers in the community willing to help older adults.

Work with the older adult’s nursing facility as he or she prepares to leave and identify how you plan to help. When possible, it would be helpful if you or other persons provide the older adult with any or all of the following: regular face-to-face contact, daily phone calls, transportation to appointments and activities, housekeeping, laundry, grocery shopping, yard work, home repairs, and financial assistance.

Religious groups can also be especially helpful for providing emotional support to those with mental illness. Consider that property owners or trailer park managers are sometimes willing to help make changes like building ramps or widening doors to make it easier for people to enter and exit their homes.

Remember that as a caregiver, you may also need your own support. The older adult’s nursing facility and other community organizations may be able to identify some resources, like support groups or respite care, for you.

About This Brief

- This brief is designed to help discharge older persons who use Medicaid and have mental health diagnoses from the nursing facility.
- Staff members of nursing facilities who have helped persons with diagnoses of anxiety, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia successfully discharge to the community suggested and use these helpful discharge strategies.

Involvement in Each Phase of the Discharge Process

With the older adult’s permission, include yourself in regular care plan or other team meetings at the nursing facility as he or she prepares to leave. At these meetings, you, the older adult, and the nursing facility staff can set goals for discharge and make plans for services available in the community. When you both participate in home evaluations that physical and occupational therapists and social workers complete, you and the older adult will better understand how to make the transition back to the community.

A social worker will complete an assessment with the older adult, including important information about his or her physical and mental health. This evaluation will help you both prepare for leaving the nursing facility and moving back home. It is also important for you to help the older adult make phone calls to set up important community services.

Your participation the person’s leaving the nursing facility will demonstrate to the nursing facility staff that you are dedicated to assisting your loved one. Following through on supporting your loved one will make the transition smoother.

“Knowing what kind of support they have in the community is real important. Do they have family that can check on them a couple times a week? Do they have someone that calls them every day? Do they have a neighbor that comes by…? How do they get to their medical appointments?” - Social Worker
Education on Physical & Mental Health Conditions and Treatment

Many nursing facilities will help you and the older adult understand more about physical & mental health diagnoses, conditions, and treatments that may avoid the older adult having to re-enter the nursing facility.

- Ask the nurse or social worker at the nursing facility to explain mental health diagnoses and related behaviors. It is good for you to ask questions about why your loved one says or does things so that you can be prepared to give good care.
- Ask the staff at the nursing facility to be honest and direct about the older adult’s health so that both of you can be realistic about making plans for after he or she leaves the facility.
- Learn the difference between symptoms of your loved one’s mental health condition and something out of the ordinary. Being aware of what you can expect because of his or her diagnosis will help you to know when to call for help. Know that it is always okay to ask for help.
- Have a nurse show you and the older adult how to complete important medical tasks like giving insulin, changing an oxygen tank or using a feeding tube.

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Contact Information for Community Resources

Ask nursing facility staff for help in locating available community services and scheduling appointments with Area Agency on Aging (AAA) case managers or other professionals. Talk about your loved one’s financial situation and needs as well. Ask for resources for caregiver support groups and websites to help reduce your stress. Suggested resources include:

- Area Agency on Aging (AAA)
  Toll-Free (866) 457-2364  www.k4a.org
- Kansas Aging and Disability Resource Connection
  www.ksadrc.org
- Social and Rehabilitation Services
  www.srs.ks.gov
- Senior Health Insurance Counseling for Kansas (SHICK)
  (800) 860-5260
- Association of Community Mental Health Centers of Kansas, Inc.
  www.acmhck.org
- Kansas Advocates for Better Care (KABC)
  www.kabc.org
- Medicaid/Medicare
  - Kansas Medicaid/Kansas Medical Assistance Program (KMARP)
    (800) 933-6593
  - State Medicaid Assistance Office
    (800) 766-9012
  - Kansas Foundation for Medical Care, Inc.
    (800) 432-0407
  - Medicare (General) Hotline
    (800) 633-4227  www.medicare.gov
  - Kansas Health Solutions
    www.kansashealthsolutions.org

“I think one of the primary things that we have to do is initially sit down with the resident and the family from the beginning, and outline what their personal goals are going to be as far as discharge.”
- Social Service Director/Social Worker

KU SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WELFARE
The University of Kansas

Office of Aging & Long Term Care
www.oaltc.ku.edu

KANSAS
DEPARTMENT ON AGING

Kansas Department on Aging
www.agingkansas.gov
1-800-432-3535