

## It Pays to be Vigilant

Many times my clients or their families complain about problems involving obtaining the right medications to their elderly loved ones who are ailing. Whether it is at a hospital, an assisted living facility, a nursing home or even at home, there is no substitute for vigilance. By vigilance, I mean having a healthy set of eyes review all medications as well as having a thorough review, possibly by a medical professional, of the potential interactions between medications prescribed by more than one physician.

At the hospital, it always pays to have an advocate present with the patient whenever medication or treatment issues are discussed. Make sure that you have filled out a HIPAA release form so that your medical professionals can discuss treatment with your advocate in case your advocate cannot be present when treatment options are discussed and so that your advocate can review your medical file. As a patient, your job is to get better. You may not be attentive enough to pay close attention to what is being prescribed or may not remember all the details later. That is what your advocate can do for you.

If the patient is going to be transferred to a nursing home facility, it is imperative that an advocate be present before, during and after the transfer. Many times, the patient's medications or prescriptions do not make the transfer with the patient. In fact, sometimes the prescriptions are misread on the receiving end and errors occur. Each nursing home will require that you use their pharmacy to fill medications because the medications arrive pre-packaged to make administration easier. Of course, it takes time for the pharmacy to fill the prescription, package it, and deliver it to the nursing home. Again, a separate HIPAA release form must be given to the nursing home and to each doctor who will treat the patient so that they can discuss treatment and share your health records with your advocate. A good practice is to write down the prescription name and dosage so as to be able to match your list to the one at the nursing home.

Much of the same holds true for assisted living facilities and home health care. HIPAA release forms should be given to all health care providers. In prior articles, I have told you about the designation of health care surrogate document wherein you designate someone to make health care decisions for you should you become incapacitated. Make sure that this document contains language that allows your health care surrogate to examine medical records and be a "designated representative" for HIPAA purposes. Remember that the designation of health care surrogate is only activated when the patient is unable to give informed consent. That is why the HIPAA release forms are important if you want another set of eyes and ears involved but you still have capacity. HIPAA release forms are available from all health care providers and should be filled out in advance and kept on file if possible.

An advocate in the health care system can make all the difference in the world. If you do not understand what a medication does, ask a pharmacist or buy a book on prescription drugs. One only has to look at the deaths of Heath Ledger or Anna Nicole Smith to see the result of improper multiple drug interactions.

Lastly, if you have no one to act as your advocate or health care surrogate, professional geriatric care managers are willing to serve in that capacity for a fee.