



Identifying the Family Caregiver: Guide for Health Care Providers

Family caregivers are often the invisible yet indispensable care providers. For you, the health care provider, the family caregiver can serve as an ally in care, providing essential information, and assuring proper care after the current care episode.

Identifying the caregiver is a first step in establishing a relationship that can yield better patient care and outcome and provide you with a better understanding of the patient, his medical condition and beyond.

Who is a Caregiver?

- **Anyone who provides care or coordinates care is a family caregiver.** This can be a member of the patient's biological family, a partner, or a friend.
- **The family caregiver can live with the patient, nearby, or in another region.**
- **Sometimes there are several family caregivers** with different roles and responsibilities. Clarifying these distinctions can help you identify specific areas of need.

How to Identify the Family Caregiver

- **Assess each situation independently.** Do not assume that whoever surrounds the patient's bed are his or her family caregivers. They may be "covering" for the family caregiver, who has other duties (job, child care) or may have been there at another time.
- **Many patients don't identify the family caregiver as a "caregiver."** If possible, ask the patient who assists him or her at home. Who do they call in case of emergency? Who helps with medication, food, doctor appointments and such? The idea of someone "helping" may be difficult for some patients; "goes with you" to doctor appointments or "deals with" medication may be phrases that elicit more information.
- **Try and identify the person most likely to assume responsibility for care after discharge.** Who lives in closer proximity to the patient? Who seems to be more knowledgeable about the patient and his condition? Who seems to have more capacity for care or care coordination? Be aware and sensitive to various dynamics.

A suggested script:

Hello, I am (*your name*). I am the (*your job title*) for (*patient's name*). We start planning for discharge early on and it is important that we work together with the people who help (*patient's name*). Do you know who those people are and how I could contact them, or do you know who I could ask?

Be sure to chart the family caregivers' names, contact numbers, and roles in care where all members of the care team can easily see and use this information in coordinating the care plan.