



Making Your Stay at Hospital Easier

Spending time in hospital can be a daunting and disempowering experience. This is especially true if you've been admitted as a psychiatric patient.

Your movements may be restricted to a single ward in hospital. Deciding what actions and treatments are in your best interest may to some degree become someone else's responsibility.

Although they are qualified to diagnose and treat a wide range of conditions, there is one subject about which you know more than the hospital staff you will encounter.

You are an expert on yourself. So are those who are closest to you. There is a way to use this knowledge which may be able to "personalise" the treatment you receive.

After you've been discharged from hospital, it is normal to look back on the experience and remember the positive and negative aspects you have encountered during your stay.

This is where a document known as an Advance Directive comes in. It gives you the chance to provide information about what treatment and support you'd like to receive, should you be admitted into hospital in the future.

After filling out your Advance

Directive, you are required to sign it in front of a Doctor, Nurse or GP to validate that you're in a fit state of mind to have made such decisions. Then, the completed document is added to your hospital records.

Advance Directives work best in conjunction with: relapse prevention/crisis plans or Wellness Recovery Action Plans (WRAPs).

Please note they are intended to function as a guideline for your treatment; they are not set in stone. **If a doctor chooses to override your Advance Directive, they must explain the reason to either you or a nominated person.**

It's a good idea to sit down and work out which other people you think would be important to your recovery should you become unwell, and include them in the process of creating your Advance Directive. Whether they're family, friends or support staff, by keeping them in the loop you're making sure you've got your support network ready to act when you need it.

If you're interested in playing a more active role in your future health care, Advance Directive forms and information can be obtained from your hospital key worker, Like Minds Taranaki, or by emailing the Taranaki Consumer Advisory Group:

tcag@hotmail.co.nz

If you needed to go to hospital in an emergency, do you have any plans in place to make sure your medication makes it there too?

This is an important question, because hospital staff need to make sure you've been prescribed medications before they can give them to you. The quickest way for them to verify this information is if they can read the pharmacy labels on the medication boxes themselves.

Because of this, it's a good idea to arrange for someone to bring your medications to the hospital for you, should you not be able to bring them yourself. Perhaps this is something you'd be able to discuss while working on your Advance Directives—including contact information for this person would make it easier for hospital staff to reach them if necessary.

It's also important to keep your medication together in a safe, secure place where it can easily be located should it be needed. This way, you're making sure ahead of time that your designated person will be able to find it and bring it for you.

Like any other emergency plan, these are measures you hope will never need to be taken—but putting a little work into them now, could make life easier if they're needed in the future.

Tony Spencer

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