

Talk about your role with your loved one. Introduce yourself to staff and describe your relationship to the patient and how you'd like to participate in care.

Observe changes (physical, behavioral, emotional) in the patient and report them to health care providers. Ask staff what observations they would like you to routinely share.

Gather helpful information (current medications, medical history, other health care providers, and insurance) and bring it all to the hospital.

Ensure that you're present, if possible, at times when information will be shared and decisions need to be made. Keep your schedule for coming to the hospital manageable. Let staff members know how to reach you and be sure you know whom to contact for information when you're away from the bedside.

Tell staff if you have any concerns about the patient's condition or safety or if you are uncomfortable because "something just doesn't feel right."

Help with decision-making about care and treatment. Be a second set of eyes and ears for the patient. Ask questions and take notes. Encourage your loved one to participate in decision-making to the extent he or she chooses.

Enlist help from staff members with whom you are comfortable so that they can support you and your loved one as you participate in care and decision-making.

Ready yourself for the transition to home or community care. Before you leave the hospital, make sure your questions and those of the patient have been answered. Know what will be needed afterwards (medications, treatment, equipment, follow-up appointments) and what changes in the patient's condition should be reported to health care providers.

