



## TIPS FOR HOW TO BE AN EFFECTIVE PATIENT OR FAMILY ADVISOR: A BEGINNING LIST

- Believe that your investment in your own health experiences or your family members' will help you in making a difference for others.
- Develop good communication skills.
- Listen with empathy.
- Be honest.
- Be available.
- Ask questions.
- Be open-minded.
- Avoid assumptions. Don't make quick judgments about people.
- Learn to be comfortable with staff and other patients and families.
- Educate other patients and families.
- Be willing to partner with other patients, family members, and staff.
- Learn negotiating skills. Be a team player. Think about the points you want to make.
- Adapt to different situations.
- Take responsibility for learning and strengthening your skills.
- Give input based on your own experience but be able to step out of your individual perspective.
- Do not deal with personal issues in advisory activities. Ask for assistance if you have had an experience that is bothering you.
- Share your own story or be clear if it is someone else's experience.
- When talking about an experience that did not go well, don't just complain – offer suggestions on how it could have been made better.
- Think carefully about the words you use. Anger is not productive. If you want to share a story that brings up strong emotions, ask a peer to help you develop your story.

- When speaking to a group, thank them for asking for your input and perspective.
- Support staff.
- Be willing to partner with staff.
- Honor commitments—when you say you are going to do something—follow through.
- Take risks.
- Have faith. Expect the best.
- Stick to it.
- Ask for help or support from other advisors when you need it. Do the same for others.
- If you find that you are having difficulty balancing your personal and/or professional life with advisory activities, ask to take a leave of absence or give up some responsibilities.

**Source:** Patient and family advisors and health care professionals attending previous IPFCC intensive training seminars.

Also see a more comprehensive resource: Abraham, M., Ahmann, L., & Dokken, D. (2013). *Words of Advice: A Guidebook for Patient, Resident, and Family Advisors*. Available from the Institute for Patient- and Family-Centered Care. ([www.ipfcc.org](http://www.ipfcc.org))