

What is 'the team'?

When hospitals talk about 'the team', this usually refers to the medical, nursing and allied health staff on a ward. This may include physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech pathologists, psychologists, social workers and dieticians.

The patient, carer and family can also be seen as part of the team, although in reality it may not feel like this. To offer the best patient care and make plans for discharge home, the staff need to be working in partnership with the patient and their family.

What are ward meetings?

Most wards in a public hospital and some wards in a private hospital, have weekly ward meetings. This is when the team gathers together to discuss each patient on the ward - the progress they're making, any issues or concerns and tentative discharge plans. This meeting is for staff only, as all patients are discussed. However, the nurse in-charge could be asked to raise important information on your behalf, as well as to update you after the meeting.

What are family conferences?

Family conferences or family meetings are quite common in hospitals, often being used to:

- ▣ inform or educate families;
- ▣ gather information from families;
- ▣ impart difficult news;
- ▣ make decisions;
- ▣ resolve conflict in families; and
- ▣ plan for the future.

It's important to know why your family conference has been called. This gives you time to prepare - to consider the issues, any questions you have and how you might respond should certain situations arise.

It's also helpful to know who will be present. A family conference may involve up to eight hospital staff. Everyone present will be there for a reason. Either they will have something to say or they will be there to answer any questions you might have. This is an opportunity for you to gather information, as well as be heard.

"I took Glen with me for support. He learnt a lot about Mum."

You are entitled to invite any family members that you would like to be there. This is a good way of involving them early on and getting their support. Having at least one support person with you is a good idea.

How to make the most of family conferences

- ▣ Take some notes with you, listing any questions you have.
- ▣ If anything is unclear, ask for further explanation.
- ▣ Nominate a family member to take notes.
- ▣ Write down the names of each staff member present, so that you can contact them later if needed.
- ▣ Invite a health professional to attend (e.g. your family member's GP, case manager, carer support worker or home care provider).



- ☒ Don't feel pressured to make decisions on the spot.
- ☒ Ask for a follow up meeting if you feel this would be of benefit.

How to participate in the care of your family member

Hospital staff recognise that it is important for carers to have input into their family member's treatment and plans for return home. Unfortunately this is sometimes overlooked in the speed of things.

Try to build a relaxed but working relationship with the staff. There will be things you can do to help without being seen as 'pushy'. Pleasant persistence is the key to achieving a partnership with the ward staff.

Carers who have experienced the hospital system share these tips.

- ☒ Make yourself known as the carer - ensure that your details are documented on the 'contacts/admission sheet' in the file.
- ☒ Speak to the nurse-in-charge or doctor to convey any important information and to seek regular updates.
- ☒ If you feel unheard put important information in writing and give this to the nurse unit manager (NUM).
- ☒ Request a family conference/meeting if you feel this would be of benefit. The NUM or social worker can arrange this.
- ☒ Contact the social work department for information and support. They can also advocate for you and your family member.

Further information:

- ☒ [Medical staff in hospitals](#) - information sheet.
- ☒ [Allied health staff in hospitals](#) - information sheet.
- ☒ [Nursing and other staff in hospitals](#) - information sheet.
- ☒ [Aged care assessment in hospital](#) - information sheet.
- ☒ [Your rights in the hospital setting](#) - information sheet.

Contact the [Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre](#) on 1800 242 636* if you would like the above information sheets to be sent to you - or to find out about other information sheets in this series.

*Free call except from mobile phones. Mobile calls at mobile rates.

We do our best to keep these links up to date, but the internet changes all the time. If you can no longer access any of the above resources, please go to our [Internet Troubleshooting Guide](#), or email us at website@carersvic.org.au