

Care Conferences and the Care Team

- What is a Care Conference?
- When are They Held?
- What's Your Role?

What is a Care Conference?

Care conferences are held for every person receiving health care at home or in a care facility. They help the “care team”—everyone involved in the person’s care—share information and work together to meet the person’s needs.

A care plan tells:

- what the person’s needs are
- what the team’s goals for meeting those needs are
- what steps are planned to meet those goals.

When Are Care Conferences Held?

The first care conference is usually held before or soon after care begins. This is a chance to share information and talk about concerns.

Here is what to expect at the first care conference:

- An assessment (a list of the needs staff see) is presented. This is used to help plan care; and it also acts to establish a starting point or “baseline” to see how things change—getting better or worse—as time goes by.
- Facts about the person are discussed, such as the person’s family and work background, medical and social needs, attitude and interests, and likes and dislikes.

- A plan is worked out so that everyone acts as a team: they know their part, and they also know what others are doing.

After the first conference, more care conferences are held as changes take place, or after a set amount of time has passed. These new meetings are used to keep the assessment, facts and plan up-to-date.



Who is On the Care Team?

For care at home or in a nursing facility, a care team includes:

- the *patient or resident*, who is the most important person on the team
- *family*, when the person asks them to come, or if the person needs help
- the *doctor*, who is in charge when it comes to medical care

- *nursing staff*, who provide nursing and personal care
- *social work staff*, who help meet emotional and social needs
- *rehab staff* (physical, occupational, speech therapy), who help set and meet goals for getting back as much function and independence as possible

In a nursing facility, the care team also includes:

- *activities staff*, who help meet the need for an active life
- *dietary staff*, who plan the kind of meals the person needs and wants.

What's Your Role?

Care conferences usually aren't for the whole care team, as it is seldom possible for everyone to attend at the same time. But you may have an important role to play.

If you are *the resident or patient*, taking part in your own care planning is a right protected by law—and one you should take advantage of, if you can. Let the care team know what you think. Do you want one thing over another? Say what your decision is.

If you are *a family member or friend*, you may be involved because the person has asked you to attend. Or if the person is no longer able to understand and make decisions, you may be asked to attend as his or her “health care representative.” Either way, you can help by being a familiar face and providing support, and by helping staff understand as much as possible about the person.

Home care or nursing facility staff who attend care conferences are there to explain, ask questions, and gather information. They then take information back with them to others on the care team, so everyone knows the plan.

How Can You Prepare?

In today's health care, there's no room for wasted time. So care conferences should run smoothly. You can help by getting ready ahead of time.

- When you are notified of the date and time of the next care conference, take the time to let staff know whether or not you plan to attend. If you want to make sure an issue or concern of yours is discussed, bring it up ahead of time.
- Be sure to arrive on time.
- Beforehand, jot down any questions or concerns you have. And make a note of any facts you think the care team should know about.
- During the meeting, speak up. If you don't understand a point, ask to go over it again. If you don't agree with something, say so.

What If You Don't Live Nearby?

You might not live close enough to come to every care conference. But even if you can't attend because of distance, you can still help the care team.

- Beforehand, raise any questions or concerns by phone, letter or e-mail, with a contact person on staff, such as a social worker.
- Afterward, talk with the staff person again. What was discussed at the care conference? What new information should you be aware of?
- If you can't usually attend, but plan to visit in the future, let staff know. With enough notice, maybe a care conference can be scheduled while you are in town.

Are Care Conferences Important?

Yes, in many ways:

- They ensure there is a team approach to care.
- They help make sure everyone providing care has the facts they need.
- They help everyone understand three key things: the person's needs; the goals set up to meet those needs; and the plan for reaching the goals.

When the Patient or Resident Can't Understand

A resident or patient might not be able to understand what's happening because of Alzheimer's, stroke, or some other condition. But he or she is still an important part of the care team. The right to take part in care planning doesn't go away because of "incapacity." However, a health care representative or family member may have to attend and speak on the person's behalf. If this happens, the representative's role is to say and do what the person would want if he or she could still take part.

My Notes: