

FAMILY MEMBER RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Veterans Health Administration is pleased to provide health care to your family member. We will provide state-of-the-art and compassionate care. We will try to make the experience as positive and pleasant as we can. Our mission is to provide quality health care, train health care professionals, conduct research, and support our country in times of national emergency. In all of these activities, our employees will respect your family member's rights and respect and support your rights as a family member. This document outlines your basic rights and responsibilities. Please talk with VA treatment team members or a patient advocate if you have any questions or would like more information about your rights or the rights of your family member.

I. Respect and Nondiscrimination

- Our staff will create a treatment environment based on dignity, compassion, respect, and nondiscrimination. We honor the personal, cultural and spiritual values of all patients and their families.
- Please help us offer care in a safe and respectful manner for our patients, family members and staff by following the facility's rules.

II. Keeping Health Information Private and Secure

- Your family member's private health care information will be protected to the fullest extent authorized by law. Information about your family member may be disclosed to you at their request, (or with prior written request for certain protected health care information) or if you are your family member's personal representative.
- Please respect the privacy of other patients/family members and keep confidential (i.e., do not discuss) private health care information that you may overhear or learn about at meetings.

III. Partnering in Care

- Families are valued members of the VA care team. As members of the care team we encourage you to:
 - Share your insights, opinions and observations about your family member's care and progress.
 - Let the nursing staff know right away if you feel that your family member's condition has changed.
 - Tell us right away if you are worried about your family member's care or treatment. Please ask questions if you do not understand the purpose of any part of your family member's care.

IV. Taking an Active Role in Treatment Decisions

When your family member is able to make health care decisions (i.e., has decision-making capacity)

- Everyone has a right to make their own health care decisions as long as they are able to tell their doctor what they want. Everyone has a right to include or not include others, such as family members or friends, in decisions about their care. We will respect your family member's wishes.

When your family member is not able to make health care decisions (i.e., lacks decision-making capacity)

- When your family member is not able to make health care decisions, another person (usually, but not always, a family member) is named to make health care decisions for your family member. The treatment team will offer that person (i.e., surrogate or health care agent):
 - Treatment options based on your family member's unique medical circumstances and needs.
 - Information you can understand about the benefits and risks of these treatment options.
 - An interpreter or assistive device, if needed, to help you understand your family member's medical circumstances and treatment options.
- If you are the surrogate or health care agent, you generally have the same rights and responsibilities as your family member would have in making treatment decisions.
 - You may agree to or refuse any treatment option offered by the treatment team. Refusing treatment will not affect your family member's right to future care.
 - Your decision about whether to accept or refuse treatments should be based on what you know your family member would want. If you do not know what your family member would want, the treatment team is available to help you consider what decisions are in your family member's best interest.
- When you are the person who will make health care decisions for your family member, please:
 - Share accurate and complete information about your family member's medical history to help us develop the best treatment plan.
 - Take part in discussions and decisions about your family member's care.
 - Help the treatment team understand how they can provide care that takes into account your family member's personal wishes, values, and spiritual beliefs.
 - Talk with the treatment team when you think your family member's treatment plan may need to be changed.

- Let the treatment team know if you are not willing or able to follow the treatment plan. If the treatment team understands why the plan may be a problem, they may be able to make changes that address your concerns.
- Help us plan for your family member's move to the next level of care.

V. Visiting Your Family Member

- Visiting hours help you support your family member as he/she copes with illness or injuries.
 - Plan a visit schedule that will meet your family member's medical and emotional needs. For example, many patients get tired easily so short visits may be better.
 - Please keep a close eye on your children for their own safety and the safety of others.
 - At times, your family member may not wish to have visitors or may wish to set other limits on visits. We will respect your family member's wishes for visits.

VI. Concerns or Complaints

- Please tell the treatment team or the facility's patient advocate if you have problems or complaints. They will give you clear information about how to make a complaint. You may also discuss your concerns, or present them in writing, without fear of retaliation.
- If you have ethical issues or concerns, you may speak with the Medical Center's Ethics Service for help.