

Care Conferences for Families

Communication with members of the health care team is important when a family member is in the hospital. It can be hard to match schedules in the fast-paced hospital setting. Connecting with the many people on your child's medical team can be a challenge.

One way to bring everyone together is to set up a family care conference. This is a meeting of the patient and family with the health care team. A family care conference can help when:

- the hospital stay is long
- there are complex issues
- something has changed unexpectedly

Purpose of a Conference

The goals of conferences include:

- discussing the family's concerns and decisions that need to be made
- outlining a plan for your child's care

This is sometimes described as “getting everyone on the same page.” Families and the care team will talk about what to expect and how to prepare for the future.

Conferences are needed to help with these things:

- talk about an extended hospital stay
- talk about different goals or viewpoints
- talk about a serious change in a patient's condition
- make changing goals of care clear
- get ready for discharge (going home)
- improve communication by having the family speak with more than one health care provider at the same time
- find more ways to support a patient and family

Asking for a Conference

Often a member of the care team will contact the family about having a conference. However, you may ask for a care conference at any time during your child's hospital stay. All you have to do is ask your child's health care team. Let them know why you would like a family care conference, and they will set one up.

Getting Ready for a Care Conference

Write down all of your questions and concerns before the conference. It may be helpful to keep your child's information in one notebook or folder.

The social worker or the care coordinator will talk with you about the care conference first. He or she will help you to decide what you want to discuss with the care team, as well as sharing with you the team's goals for your child's care. Together you will discuss who will attend the meeting. This will help you communicate your needs and goals during the conference.

These team members are usually included in the care conference:

- attending doctor
- consulting specialists
- bedside nurse
- social worker
- care coordinator

Other members of your child's health care team who have experience working with similar situations may also be included, such as:

- therapists
- chaplain
- home care provider(s)

You may want to include your own:

- support person(s)
- clergy member
- child's primary care doctor

The social worker or care coordinator will then invite everyone and set up the time and place of the care conference.

During the Conference

The conference will begin with introductions. A person from the care team will lead the conference. This person will make communications easier, and will go over and make clear the goals of the meeting. Doctors will explain your child's medical condition. They will review what has happened and what can be expected.

The team will describe possible treatments and expected outcomes. Other team members will give information from their points of view. If there are any decisions that need to be made, these will be listed.

During the Conference, continued

The person who leads the conference will make sure that your questions are answered or that a plan is made to get more information. The conference leader and the doctor will make sure the plan for your child's treatment is clear and agreed upon and talk about next steps.

After the Conference

The social worker or care coordinator will follow up with you after the care conference. At that time, you can bring up any other questions or concerns. You will be given more education and referrals. The need for more care conferences will be discussed. After the conference, if there is something else that you would like to discuss with your child's care team, please contact the social worker or care coordinator.