

## PATIENT RIGHTS

### **Basic patients' rights include the following:**

- **Respect:** -Patients have the right to be treated with dignity and respect. Respect and dignity include patients' right to personal choices.
- **Services and Fees:** Patients have the right to be told in writing about the services and their cost before they decide on home health care.
- **Money:** Patients have the right to manage their own money or to choose someone else they trust to manage it for them.
- **Privacy:** Patients have the right to privacy and to keep and use their personal belongings as long as it doesn't interfere with the rights, health, or safety of others.
- **Medical Care:** Patients have the right to be told about their medical condition and medicines and to see their own doctor if they so choose. Patients also have the right to refuse medicine and treatments.

There are a lot of things involved in making sure that each of these basic rights is given to all patients. As home health aides, we are directly responsible for some of these rights. For some others, we are responsible for telling our supervisor if a patient asks for something that we cannot personally do.

**Respect-**Respect and dignity include many areas of care. Let's look at some things you can personally do.

**Patients have the right to privacy-** This means that we have a responsibility to knock on a patient's door before we go in. This is something we do even for patients who are not alert or able to answer our knock.

- If we have come to the room to give personal hygiene care, we should introduce ourselves before we begin. Before we expose any part of a patient's body, we need to see that the door is closed. This is to make sure that a patient's body is not exposed during personal caregiving. If we are helping a patient to the bathroom and his clothing does not fully cover the private parts of his body, we need to make sure to cover him with a sheet or blanket.
- If we see a card or letter on a patient's bedside table, we must not read it. Whatever is in the card or letter belongs to the patient. Whatever someone has said to them is private, and we should not read it without permission. A patient may want you see her cards, and that is a wonderful compliment, but we only read them if we are invited to do so.

These are all things that any person would expect to have done for him if he were not able to do it for himself. This is why a patient's right to privacy is so important.

### **Patients have the right to be called by their given name and title.**

- When talking to patients, you should always remember to use their title (Mr., Mrs., \_or Miss) and their given name (Smith, Davis, etc.). Unless a patient has asked to be called by some other name (documented in her chart) you should always call her by her title and given name. This is a sign of respect, and it gives her the dignity she is due. If you are not sure whether her nickname is on the chart, ask your supervisor.

**Patients have the right to choose.** Some of those choices include the following:

- The right to choose their own clothing
- The right to choose their friends
- The right to have their own spending money
- The right to be spoken to in a respectful way
- The right to decide their own bedtime
- The right to have activities to enjoy
- The right to be treated as an adult

When we look at this list, it might seem hard to believe that these are rights. Sometimes we haven't looked at it that way, because we automatically do these things for ourselves every day. But when someone needs home care, we need to remind ourselves that these "automatic" things for us are no longer automatic for the patient.

Because of a patient's illness, mental status, or physical ability, she needs someone else to help her keep her rights going. That someone is the caregiver. That is why our job is so important and why it is so important that we don't forget to honor their right to choose.

### **Patients have the right to good medical care.**

Of course, we all know that patients have a right to medical care for their illness, and they have the right to know what is wrong with them and which medicines they are taking. But, just as they have the right to receive medical care, they also have the right to refuse it. They can also refuse their medicines. If you have a patient who constantly refuses to let you take care of her, you must report this to your supervisor. He may be able to have a meeting with the patient and the patient's doctor to see if the patient will accept care in the future.

### **Patients have the right to manage their own money.**

Patients who are mentally able can decide how their own money is spent. They have the right to decide how their money is managed or they can choose someone they trust to manage it for them. This is a very important right to patients. Many of them have worked for 40 or 50 years to earn a living. They may have had a family to support, so they have grown used to taking care of their own money. It is a matter of self-esteem and self-confidence.

Patients have given up some of the things they treasure when they come to a nursing home, such as the familiar treasures they had around them for years and years.

Patients have spent a lifetime making personal choices, the same way we make our choices each day. When they grow old and have an illness that causes them to need home health care, that doesn't mean they don't have a right to choose some things for themselves. As long as it doesn't create a safety hazard for them or others, patients must be allowed to make personal choices.

They have to give up some of their independence because of their illness, but they should never have to give up their basic rights as grown people. That is why it is necessary to let them have as many choices and chances to control their life as possible.

### **Patients have a right to know about services and fees.**

This means that the home health agency has a responsibility to tell patients about how much they have to pay each month.' It is a law that the agency tells the patients these things before they are ever admitted to home health care.

Although this is not directly our responsibility, there might be a time when it is important for us to know that this is one of their rights. If a patient tells us she wants to know about her bill or something to do with the agency, it is our responsibility to tell our supervisor that she has asked us about this. Sometimes a patient does not know whom to ask, but our supervisor can see that someone at the agency helps the patient with these questions.

As health care workers we are one of the most important people in our patients' lives. They see us every day and depend on us for their needs. That's why they sometimes ask us questions we cannot answer. It is okay not to know how to answer every question they ask, but it's not okay for us to ignore it or make excuses. We should pass these questions along to our supervisor so that they do not go unanswered.

You will find that there are many things included in patients' rights that are not part of your job. It is important to remember, though, that if a patient asks you about some of these things, you should do what you can to make sure your supervisor knows. This way you will be doing your part as a home health aide.

Remember also that the rights we have talked about are **actually laws**. The federal government checks to make sure that all of these rights are being met. Every health care worker should do everything possible not to break these laws. Most important, though, is the fact that, as a home health aide, you have the professional obligation first to do all you can to help patients have a good quality of life.

We have spent time going over some of the basic patient rights. The full list of all patients' rights is available at your agency. You may have already seen and read them. If not, you can ask your supervisor or the DON for a copy you can have. It is so important to read and understand patients' rights. If we do not understand what is expected of us, it is difficult to do a good job.