Emergency Room Tips for Caregivers

Hearing the words ambulance or emergency room is a scary proposition for most people, but even more so when it involves someone with dementia. Not only is your loved one in some type of crisis, but the setting in which they are receiving help, at times, can also be very stressful. That is why it is important to plan ahead so that when that emergency does arise you have the necessary tools in place to ensure that your loved one is kept calm, safe and receives the most efficient and effective care possible.

Organize Your Paperwork: This is very important, especially if you are caring for someone with dementia. Everyone should have a copy of their Power of Attorney for Healthcare or Guardianship paperwork with them at all times, because an emergency can happen anywhere and at any time.

For those caring for someone with dementia this is especially important if the document has been activated, meaning two physicians or a physician and psychologist have signed the form stating that this person is no longer capable of making medical decisions for themselves or is incapacitated. Once activated this document then informs the Medical Team who is legally able to make important healthcare decisions for your loved one.

In addition, if your loved one has a “Do Not Resuscitate” Order from a physician it is important to have a copy of this as well and they should be wearing a “DNR” bracelet at all times.

Know Their History: In an emergency, your loved one may not be able to speak for themselves. Therefore, it is important to know their health history, allergies and current medication list. The Chippewa Valley Family Caregiving Alliance provides a handy pocket-guide called the Caregiver Health Guide, which can help you capture and keep this information with you at all times. This Guide can be easily downloaded and printed from their website, which is located at www.chippewavalleycaregiving.org.

Be Their Advocate: As the caregiver for someone with dementia, you may have already found yourself being their voice when ordering at a restaurant or when having conversations with friends and family. Throughout the disease process, your voice begins to fill-in where theirs cannot. The same is true in an Emergency Room setting. You need to be their voice to help provide information quickly and correctly to the Medical Team. Otherwise, the wrong procedure, medication or conclusion about care might be reached. You need to tell them what your loved one would want to happen.

Communicate: The best form of communication is to tell whoever is in the room who you are, what your role is in the care of your loved one, and who is legally making the decisions about care for this situation. It is also good to give them a brief medical history for your loved one. For example, “Hi, my name is Paula; I am Jerry’s daughter and legal guardian. Dad has Lewy Body Dementia. He fell down the stairs, hit his head and is not talking like he normally does.” This introduction should be made to every person who enters your loved one’s room.

Calm and Collect: Another very important role is to be there for your loved one and to do your best help keep them calm and comfortable. Hold their hand, talk closely and soothingly to them. While at the same time, collect all of the information on your loved one’s condition, procedures they will be having done, hospitalization expectations and discharge instructions.
Question the Care: Lastly, make sure that you ask questions along the way, so that your loved one receives the care that they need. In addition, this will ensure that you understand what care they will need once they are discharged. By using these tips, you will be helping to ensure the best care for your loved one in every situation, emergency or not.

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