

Information on your rights to Mental Health Advocacy during ward rounds

What is Mental Health Advocacy?

If you are receiving care or treatment in hospital or in the community and feel unable to represent your own interests, an advocate may be able to help and support you.

Independent Mental Health Advocate (IMHA)

Under the Mental Health Act 1983, you may have a legal right to a specially trained Independent Mental Health Advocate if you are:

- A patient under Section in hospital or the community
- Subject to Guardianship or a Community Treatment Order

An IMHA can assist you with Mental Health Act issues and rights.

If you want to know more about this service or are unsure if you can access it, please ask for seAp's IMHA leaflet and talk to us, or to a Mental Health Professional.

Informal Patient Advocate

Although there is no legal right to an advocate, seAp also provides an advocacy service for informal patients. Often, this will be the same advocate who provides the IMHA service.

Contact us for more information.

What is a ward round?

During your stay in hospital you will be invited to participate in a 'ward round'. Ward rounds usually take place once a week.

Ward rounds provide an opportunity for you to discuss your progress with your doctor and other staff involved in your care. You can also raise any issues or concerns you may have about your care or treatment.

What is an advocate?

An experienced worker, known as an advocate can help and support you to deal with issues that are important to you, especially in situations where you may feel unable to speak up on your own. An advocate will help to ensure your concerns are heard.

An advocate is:

Independent: We are not part of statutory health and social services.

Confidential: We will not talk about you outside of our organisation unless you ask us to, or you disclose something which leads us to believe you or someone else may be at risk of serious harm or abuse, or assisting a serious criminal offence or if there is a court order for disclosure.

Empowering: You are in control of the advocacy process and no decisions are made without your consent.

An Advocate will:

- Spend time with you to get to know you
- Act on your behalf with your permission
- Ask questions and find information for you
- Inform you of your rights and how to exercise them

An Advocate will not:

- Impose views or opinions or make decisions or choices on your behalf
- Divulge any information without your permission, except in the circumstances mentioned above

What you are entitled to expect

Attendance is voluntary

You do not have to attend the ward round if you do not wish. If appropriate, you should be given the opportunity to raise issues or concerns with a member of staff in a different setting. You should be made aware of any decision made in your absence and have a chance to comment.

Numbers of people kept to a minimum

The number of professionals at the meeting should be kept to a minimum. Whenever possible, your named/primary nurse, should attend the ward round. You should be introduced to everyone and told why they are there. You should be asked for permission for students to attend.

You may have someone to support you

You may want to have an advocate/relative or friend present at ward rounds. Unless there are very good reasons why this is not appropriate, staff should encourage and allow attendance. Hospital staff should help you to arrange this. An IMHA has a right to attend meetings between patients and hospital staff, if you want the IMHA to be there.

Appointment times

You, and anyone attending with you, should be given an appointment time in advance. A member of hospital staff should be nominated to be responsible for the smooth running of all appointments. You can approach them for information.

Punctuality

The ward round should start on time and you should not be kept waiting. If there is a change in time, you and your advocate should be informed, given an explanation and a new time.

Personal and sensitive information

You should not be asked about personal or painful areas of your life during a ward round, unless it is thought necessary. Your right to confidentiality should be explained to you.

Helping you to communicate

If you have additional needs such as physical, sensory or learning disabilities, staff should provide appropriate extra support for you. If you have difficulty speaking or reading English, you should be offered an interpreter. Staff should make adjustments if you have any cultural or religious beliefs.

Layout of the room

Every effort should be made to make you feel comfortable and you should be offered a seat that makes you feel as much part of the discussion as possible.

Refreshments

If drinks and snacks are available to the staff, they should also be available to you.

How can an advocate help me during ward rounds?

The level of involvement of your advocate depends on what you tell us you need - we will only take action if you ask us to.

An advocate can:

- Help you plan for your ward round meeting.
- Help you think through the issues you want to discuss.
- Help you make notes that will remind you what you want say during the ward round.
- Help you consider how the professionals involved in your care might respond to what you say.
- Attend ward rounds with you and provide 'moral support' by giving you the support and reassurance you need.
- Take notes for you during the ward round.
- Play an active part in the meeting by challenging decisions, asking for clarification on key points or prompting you if you forget something that you want to say.
- Speak on your behalf if you do not want to speak for yourself during the meeting.

How can I prepare for a ward round?

- Think through the issues you want to discuss.
- Make a checklist of all the things you want to raise.
- You may want to give a copy of your checklist to your key nurse.
- Consider whether you need advocacy support.
- Make a request for an advocate, if you think you would like some help during the ward round.
- Think about how the professionals involved in your care might respond to what you say.
- Think about what other options might be acceptable to you.
- Try to discuss the issues you want to raise with someone before the meeting. This will help staff be aware of what you want talk about, so that they can prepare accordingly.
- Make sure key people who you want to attend the ward round, e.g. Care Manager or Support Worker, are invited. Ask your key nurse to check.

Contact us:

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