IDENTIFYING WHAT MATTERS

Many hospitals are trying to take better care of older patients by making sure that the health care team understands what matters most to these patients. With this information, the team can adjust its care as much as possible to meet these desires. This video shows an older woman and her family caregiver responding to a nurse’s questions about what matters most. What Matters is one of the “4Ms”; the following three videos make up the other sections of the 4Ms—Medications, Mentation (memory and mood), and Mobility.

Before a Planned Hospital Stay
As the family caregiver, you have a lot to do to get ready for a planned hospital stay, such as for a hip or knee replacement. But it’s important to take some time to discuss with the person you care for what he or she values most and what he or she wants the hospital stay to accomplish.

Many people would just shrug and say, “I just want to get home!” That’s understandable, but you can dig deeper. Say something like, “Mom, until your knee bothered you so much, you liked to take walks in the park with your friends. Is that something you’d like to get back to?” Or, if your family member or friend says (as many will), “It is important to me to stay in touch with my family so they don’t worry about me,” then you can say, “I will find out about taking your cell phone to the hospital. I know that they have electronic tablets so that you can see and talk to all the grandkids.”

Some things that matter most may be difficult to achieve, like regaining the full level of mobility that existed before an accident. In that case, the goal may be more modest but still possible with hard work. Other wishes, like eating favorite foods, may be arranged with a consultation with a dietitian. If your family member or friend doesn’t feel comfortable speaking English, the hospital can provide a translator, either in person or by phone.

Understandably, this conversation may be difficult if you are going to the hospital for an emergency, but even then, or when the your family member or friend is admitted and comfortable, you can begin the discussion.

It’s important to have advance directives in place. These are instructions that tell hospital staff what the patient wants to happen (or not) in case he or she is unable to make decisions about care. If the person you care for has already completed some form of advance directive, be sure to bring it to the hospital. If this conversation has not happened yet, it is still important to start talking about the person’s wishes. The most important document is the health care proxy, which names a person to make health care decisions if the person is unable to do so. Make sure you have copies of any documents at home. It’s a good idea to give other family member or friends copies as well.

In the Hospital
If you have already had this discussion, when a nurse asks your family member or friend what matters most to him or her, your family member or friend will be better prepared to answer. And if the nurse does not ask, you can start the conversation. Sometimes people forget or are reluctant to respond to what may seem too personal a question. For example, what matters most to a person with deep religious faith may be to pray at the required times and in the traditional manner. In this case, a hospital chaplain may be able to help make this possible. The nurse should add the information to the white board that lists the hospital staff and contact information so that everyone knows what matters most to this person.

After Discharge
What matters most does not end at hospital discharge. If the person emphasized regaining mobility, physical therapy may be needed. That often involves hard work and some discomfort, which means that your family member or friend may need encouragement to continue the exercises. Connections with family and friends can be maintained, which may be a valuable source of emotional support during recovery and beyond.
**Additional Resources**

> The Institute for Healthcare Improvement, which created the “What Matters to You?” movement, has information about the global response at [http://www.ihi.org/Topics/WhatMatters/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.ihi.org/Topics/WhatMatters/Pages/default.aspx).

> Medline Plus, an online publication of the National Library of Medicine, has extensive information about advance directives. Go to [https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000472.htm](https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000472.htm).

For more information, go to [www.AARP.org/nolongeralone](http://www.AARP.org/nolongeralone).

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