

Nurse as Patient Advocate: An Expectation for Delivery of Comprehensive Patient Care

A Case Study:

Mrs. Smith has been diagnosed with stomach cancer; as her nurse, you notice that this patient appears very unmotivated and therefore, unwilling to comply with her recovery plan. While Mrs. Smith says she is going to comply with the plan, she is reluctant to do much: she refuses to get out of bed to walk, she eats little, and she is withdrawn. The only conversation she is willing to engage in is making decisions about what to give away to her children and grandchildren.

Mia, a new nurse on the unit, is feeling increasingly frustrated by Mrs. Smith's reluctance to comply with her recovery. She walks cheerfully into Mrs. Smith's room, gives her a pep-talk, tells her that all is fine as she playfully admonishes her to get out of bed and take a walk. Mrs. Smith is pleasant and agreeable, but she never follows-through. Mia doesn't know what to do; she wants Mrs. Smith to start to take some initiative in her own recovery, but her efforts at motivating her patient are not producing results.

The Role of an Advocate:

Mia shares her frustration about Mrs. Smith with a more senior nurse, Linda. Linda educates Mia about the importance of being an advocate for her patients, in order that they get the comprehensive care they need. In the case of Mrs. Smith, advocacy needs to be focused on getting the doctor to order a psych assessment, so that Mrs. Smith can become more motivated and involved in her own recovery.

Following the conversation with Linda, Mia shares her concerns with doctor Chin, the doctor who is treating Mrs. Smith. His initial response to Mia's concerns is to dismiss them as alarmist. He reassures Mia that Mrs. Smith will eventually be more compliant in time-"it's no big deal", is his reply.

The Skills of a Successful Advocate:

Dismayed by the response of Dr. Chin, Mia decides to pay closer attention to Mrs. Smith's behavior; through her observation, she notices that Mrs. Smith is actually getting less compliant: she hardly eats, refuses to walk and her desire to communicate is greatly diminished.

Mia arranges to meet with Dr. Chin again to highlight her concerns about Mrs. Smith's deteriorating condition. She prepares for her meeting armed with important information about Mrs. Smith's condition and a commitment to be heard. Her successful advocacy encourages the doctor to order a psychiatric evaluation so that Mrs. Smith can get the appropriate intervention to address her psychological needs.

Outcome:

As a result of Mia's effective advocacy, Mrs. Smith receives a psychiatric evaluation and begins to get the help she needs in order to comply with her recovery plan. Not only does Mrs. Smith receive the benefit, but Mia also gets to experience the satisfaction of truly helping a patient who was unable to ask for help when she truly needed it.

© 2007 SupportForNurses.com. This article is free to distribute provided the PDF is unchanged and these credits remain intact. For more articles, Tips Booklets and Nurses' Toolkits, please visit www.supportfornurses.com.