

Make Your Phone Call Count:

How to Help Your Loved One In Hospital

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Bluewater Health has had to make the difficult but necessary decision to implement visitor restrictions at its hospitals in Petrolia and Sarnia. This can be especially difficult for our elderly patients who may need their loved ones for support.

Did You Know...

- Family members play a crucial role in minimizing anxiety and providing a sense of comfort in unfamiliar settings?
- Telephone calls can help decrease your loved one's anxiety and hearing a familiar voice may help your loved one feel connected and supported while in the hospital?

Hospital settings can be confusing for older adults and can put them at high risk for delirium (a sudden confusion) and functional decline. Here are some tips to include in your conversations each time you speak with your loved one:

- While talking to them on the phone, gently re-orient them. If needed, remind them of:
 - Who they are (especially if they have a history of being confused);
 - Where they are;
 - Why they are in the hospital; and
 - The day, month, season and year. For example, you can say in your conversation: "it's a beautiful spring day today..." or "what a beautiful Monday morning."
- Ask your loved one about their day: Have they had their meal yet? Are they keeping hydrated? (unless otherwise advised by medical team) Have they gotten up to the chair today?
- Talk to your loved one about what they are experiencing. This can help reduce feelings of anger, fear, frustration and anxiety.
- Talk to your loved one about something they are interested in. Is there a book they like to read or talk about? Is there a TV program they watch and would like to talk about?
- Give an update about your family or people your loved one knows and cares about.
- If you know the plan of care, please re-iterate it to your loved one. For example, "Your doctor or team tells me that you could be coming home by the end of the week..."
- Report signs of sudden confusion in your loved one to the healthcare team immediately, e.g. if you notice your loved one does not seem to be their usual self (e.g. they have trouble paying attention, or have slurred speech)

Try to touch base with your loved one via phone every day.

Sample conversation script:

“Hi mom. It’s your daughter, Ellen. How are you? Do you have your hearing aids in?”

“You have been at Bluewater Health since yesterday. You had a fall. Today is Monday, November 30, 2020. It is a cold day today, I had to wear a winter coat. I can’t believe it will be winter soon – what do you enjoy about winter?”

“How are you feeling today in the hospital?”

“What is the name of your nurse today? I was told your nurse is Jason today...”

“Have you gotten out of bed today? Have you been up in the chair today?”

“Do you have your glasses on?”

How Else Can You Help?

If your loved one needs essential devices such as hearing aids, glasses or dentures please label each device and drop them off at one of the hospital’s patient screening centres.

You may also drop off objects and activities from home that are familiar to your loved one and that they enjoy (e.g. non-slip shoes, photo albums, deck of playing cards, large-print word games and reading material).

Resource: Based on a document by Hamilton Health Sciences

