



### **What is a Private Patient Advocate?**

Preventable medical error is now the third leading cause of death in the United States, after heart disease and cancer, according to a recent study from Johns Hopkins. Another report, this one published in the Journal of Patient Safety, showed that an estimated 440,000 people die each year in this country as a result of medical error.

These concerning statistics are just two reasons why one might want to consider hiring a patient advocate, a person whose job is to help patients navigate the healthcare landscape and ensure they receive the best care possible. The complexities of the health care system and health insurance can be stressful, confusing, and overwhelming even under the best of circumstances — not to mention when you're dealing with a serious illness.

This growing class of professionals known as patient advocates has emerged to help, providing guidance on everything from identifying an excellent doctor to reviewing potential treatment plans and staying on top of billing issues.

People run into challenges choosing insurance. There are the billing errors one inevitably stumbles into, and when one actually needs to access care, even getting an appointment can be enormously difficult. In addition, communicating with physicians can also be immensely difficult because often appointments are condensed into 8 or 10-minute time slots, and patients may have many questions that can't be addressed in that short period of time.

For all of these reasons and more, it's important to understand exactly what a patient advocate is and how one might help you. Sometimes the only way to be sure you get the best service and outcomes possible from the healthcare system is to find someone else to help you navigate through the maze of providers, tests, treatments, and of course, medical bills you'll encounter.

But finding "someone else" and finding an expert, are two different things. Your sister or spouse may be able to help you. A neighbor who works in a doctor's office might help you. But the most professional and objective help you're going to find will come from a private health advocate, also called a patient advocate or navigator. They are someone who knows the ins and outs of the system and can facilitate your path to recovery, or at least make your medical challenges easier to weather.

### **Why Should You Pay for Private Advocacy Services?**

While our insurance covers so many of the services we get for our healthcare, private advocates are not. That may initially sound like a negative — that in order to get help from a patient advocate or navigator you would have to pay for the service out of your pocket. But that's really to your benefit. Here's why:

When your insurance covers services, they are, by definition, limited. Your doctor won't spend as much time with you because she will only be reimbursed X amount of money. Or, your stay in the hospital will be limited because your insurance only covers X number of days. Your insurance dictates your care.

But when you pay for something privately, then the only limit is your own limit, what you are willing to pay. And when you hire an advocate to be on your side, it might be the advocate who knows how to squeeze an extra 15 minutes out of the doctor appointment or the extra few days out of your hospital stay.

The whole point is to improve the quality of your care by having an expert on your side who is solely devoted to that improvement in the quality of your care.

Look at it another way: The reason you hire a real estate broker to help you buy or sell a home is because he or she is the expert. Sure—you could buy a "for sale by owner" without a broker—but what if something went wrong? You don't know what you don't know—but brokers do know because they deal in real estate every day. So, it's worth the extra expense.

The reason you hire a CPA is because you want an expert to help you with your taxes. Sure, you could use tax software, or a pencil and a calculator, and do it yourself. But what if you missed a deduction? Or what if you don't understand a form? Again — you don't know what you don't know — but a CPA does know because that's her area of expertise. It's worth the extra expense.

When you need a lawyer, mechanic, or plumber, you contact these individuals due to the expertise in their field. All of these examples address your home, your taxes, or your legal matters. And neither is nearly as important as your health, or your life. So, spending the money on a professional advocate is worth it — because you don't know what you don't know.

### **What You Can Expect From A Private Patient Advocate?**

Many patient advocates come from the medical community and have backgrounds as RNs or physicians. They're well aware of the time constraints present in the healthcare system and strive to balance patient needs with the limitations physicians face.

I coach my clients on the fact that the practitioners we're going to see are ordered by the system to move patients through. I brace them for the fact that the national standard is eight to 15 minutes for a patient visit. We have to prepare for the fact that we're likely only going to be seen for 10 to 15 minutes and oh, by the way, while we're there the physician will be documenting and on the computer; there's a lot going on during that time. So, I make sure we're very well-organized, we've got the questions all mapped out, and I've got the patient prepped.

I also prepare practitioners for the patient advocate's arrival ahead of time. To avoid potential challenges, I always recommend clients inform their providers early on of their intent to work with a private advocate. I also make sure that if I'm attending appointments or hospital visits, either myself or the client informs the healthcare team beforehand. HIPAA forms are submitted in advance, and I keep a copy on hand. This helps to ensure there are no surprises.

Hughes Advocacy works closely with clients before an appointment to outline and prepare any questions they might have, as well as assemble a high-level view of the client's issues. I usually do a summary sheet before the appointment that lists our issues, and if it's a client with multiple issues, usually there's an acknowledgment that we realize there may not be time to address all of these different problems.

For patients with complex medical needs, I may give a copy of the summary to the medical assistant, who will give it to the clinician to look at while the patient is being checked in. My goal there is that they can scan over it and make sure there aren't issues that they feel are higher-priority.

During the appointment, the simple act of notetaking can add a level of accountability that gives more detail to the process. I take notes the whole time, making sure the questions are answered and understood.

While patient advocates work to ensure their patients feel understood, many are also able to fall back on their professional background to better address physicians' first concerns.

From my experience of working in the operating room, I know what doctors want to hear first, second, and third. Patients want to go into a story and physicians stop listening.

If there's a patient advocate on board, [physicians] can communicate much more efficiently with a colleague rather than listening to a family member talk for 45 minutes. We can come in, hand you a two-page professionally prepared medical profile or care plan that says who this patient is, what happened today, what we're concerned about, etc. If you have a professional that knows how doctors think and knows what information they need, you just cut down on the amount of time that they have to spend, and then they can quickly, accurately diagnose the patient to get them treated instead of standing around scratching their heads because the patient's too sick to give an accurate history.

### **Empowered patients report higher satisfaction with care teams**

## **What Can Hughes Advocacy Do For You and Your Loved Ones?**

Hughes Advocacy assists patients and their families to navigate the healthcare system. Medical errors are the third leading cause of death in the U.S., according to a recent study at Johns Hopkins University, and 80% of those errors are due to miscommunication. I provide my clients with enhanced patient-provider communication, which also enhances patient safety and clinical outcomes. Whether you're trying to understand a diagnosis, find the top physicians, evaluate treatment options or track your medical history, Hughes Advocacy will be there to help you get the best healthcare possible.

Hughes Advocacy wants to improve patient's healthcare quality, and the Improvement starts with properly utilizing the time before and during an appointment or hospitalization. Healthcare providers depend on patients to provide complete and accurate information, regarding medication and health history. Before an appointment, Hughes Advocacy helps to gather and organize our clients' patient records in order to present a full picture to physicians. We also ensure patients ask the right questions during appointments. This helps prevent adverse outcomes due to miscommunications that prevent patients from following through their plan of care.

### **Some of the services that Hughes Advocacy offers are as follows:**

- Review in detail your Medical and Medication Records
- Provide research for a Surgeon or Facility that best fits your Medical Needs
- Provide Peace of Mind to You and Your Family
- Exploring all of your different treatment options
- Preparing you for upcoming doctors' appointments
- Medication Management
- Assist in making informed medical decisions
- Working as a liaison between my clients and their medical team. This team could be in the ER, in the hospital, for an upcoming procedure, or someone who has multiple doctors. I assist in the Coordination of Care with their Medical Team
- Translation of complicated diagnoses, procedures and treatment plans, leading to better-informed health care decisions
- Accompanying clients to their doctor's appointments or preparing them for any upcoming appointments
- Understand your individualized needs and goals for your care

My goal as an advocate is to be your voice and to represent my client in their best interest in any medical situation. To put my client back at the center of their Health.

Hughes Advocacy is an active member of the Alliance of Professional Health Advocates, National Association of Healthcare Advocacy Consultants, The Patient Safety Movement, Greater National Advocates, CampaignZero, and Medical Group Management Association. All contracts are legally bound and HIPPA protected. Hughes Advocacy also has Error and Omission Insurance.

Hughes Advocacy works on a retainer fee. All advocacy services are included to any family member who falls under the same insurance policy within the household.