Nothing adds to a family’s stress, reduces satisfaction or misuses provider resources more than a lack of adequate communication when a loved one is hospitalized. Including patients and families as extra “eyes and ears” to maintain high quality care means giving them a clear path of communication. A handout shared with the patient upon admission establishes a clear course of action that patients and families can follow.

Sometimes a family member may feel the need for a few extra minutes with key members of the care team to discuss a particular issue or concern that transcends any one shift or care team member. These may include coordinating pain medication, communicating about test results, etc.

Recommended tips for caregivers and patients who are or will be hospitalized:

- Ask your family members and caregivers to be present at the shift change, if possible. Alternatively, arrange to call or email them afterward. You can easily set up a free online account at CaringBridge.org to keep everyone up to date.
- Write your questions down as they occur to you during the course of a shift, so that you can get the most out of your “huddle” time.
- Limit this conversation with nurses to treatment (medical) issues, and use hospital feedback forms to share what you like or don’t like about the food, parking, or hospital policy. (Let staff know if you need one.)
- Respect that during this process, nursing staff have only a few minutes with each patient. Be thoughtful of the next patient, who’s waiting for his or her few minutes, too! If the issue too complex or detailed for this time, let your nurse know you want to schedule a longer appointment.
- Understand that an emergency situation with another patient may throw off your scheduled time. If this happens, the hospital should do its best to let you know and work with you.
- Engage with respect…the nurse might have no idea you have a concern. Adopt an attitude of helpfulness and approach the nurse as a professional who would want to know what you have to share.
- If bedside shift change huddles are not offered by the hospital, ask if this can be arranged to help everyone better communicate, minimize misunderstandings and to coordinate care.
- If the issue impacts the entire care team, ask if the full team can meet either at shift change or at an alternate time to ensure everyone gets on the same page.