

## Why is a Patient Advocate Important?

**T**oday's complex healthcare system is increasingly fragmented. Our tribal members are seeing multiple specialists and scrambling to keep track of treatment plans. Confusing medical bills and insurance coverage pose challenges to even the most informed patients. Patient advocacy can play a vital role in easing the burden patients experience while navigating the healthcare system.

### **OUR VIEWPOINT FOR PATIENT ADVOCACY:**

Our program is based on a philosophy of prioritizing Dot Lake Village tribal members on a standard of Patient-centered care. Patient-centered care is structured with a partnering value, creating a personalized, proactive strategy to optimize health and well-being. This personalized approach is a dynamic adaptation or customization of recommended patient-centered education, prevention, and treatment that is specifically relevant to the individual user based on the patient's history, clinical presentation, lifestyle, behavior, and preferences.

### **ISSUES PATIENT ADVOCATES CAN ADDRESS:**

Managing health care can be challenging at the best of times. For older adults with cognitive impairment or people battling exhaustion symptoms, navigating one's healthcare can be daunting. The results? Patients put off getting the care they need or do not seek care at all.

Patients and their caregivers may spend a lot of time poring over insurance forms or other documents with written jargon they find challenging to follow. They can easily misunderstand diagnoses and treatment options. Such misunderstanding can result in the less effective use of medical services. For example, patients may undergo duplicate diagnostic tests, miss appointments, or take the wrong medication dosage.

Hard-to-interpret health insurance coverage sometimes results in patients not taking full advantage of what is available. Other times, patients mistakenly pay inaccurate medical bills containing errors or charges that were actually covered by their health insurance plans.

While the national conversation of healthcare has focused on ways to address these problems, many patients need individual guidance "Patient Advocates" can help.

### **WHAT IS A PATIENT ADVOCATE?**

Patient Advocates give patients and families while helping to customize and navigate the healthcare system. A Patient Advocate's role entails the following:

- ❖ Helping patients access health care;
- ❖ Educating patients so they can make well-informed healthcare decisions;
- ❖ Guiding patients through their medical care, insurance questions, and administrative and legal tasks.

Dot Lake Village has implemented this program to better serve

our tribal members with their care.

## **TYPES OF ASSISTANCE:**

The healthcare system has many layers and creates a need for several types of Patient Advocacy. For example, a “*Harvard Business Review*” analysis found that 52 percent of patients in the U.S. cannot navigate the complexity of the healthcare system without help. Whether assisting patients concerned about an unclear diagnosis or clarifying confusing medical charges, patient advocates offer a range of services:

## **WHAT DOES A PATIENT ADVOCATE DO?**

While healthcare advocates may have areas of specialization, their cases often require them to work across the spectrum of advocacy services.

Facilitation sits at the heart of healthcare advocacy. Patient advocates do not make decisions for their clients but make them aware of their options. Instead, they cultivate a better understanding of the healthcare system by giving their clients background knowledge. Finally, they offer the type of support that helps patients get their questions answered and their problems addressed.

Ultimately, healthcare advocates strive to handle healthcare’s logistical issues so patients and their families can focus on health and healing.

## **TYPES OF ASSISTANCE:**

### **Medical Care Advocacy:** *(navigation services include)*

- ❖ Communicating with a healthcare provider;
- ❖ The setting of, coordinating, and attending appointments;
- ❖ Speaking up about patient rights;
- ❖ Identifying health resources and assisting with referrals, including a physical therapist, nutritionist, mental health, etc.;
- ❖ Explaining confusing medical information;
- ❖ Clarifying diagnoses and conditions;
- ❖ Coordinating care between specialists;
- ❖ Providing crisis intervention;

### **Medical Billing Advocacy:** *(navigating medical billing can include)*

- ❖ Reviewing medical bills for accuracy;
- ❖ Investigating the possibilities for third-party reimbursement;
- ❖ Negotiating bills with providers;
- ❖ Getting billing errors adjusted;

### **Health Insurance Advocacy:** *(navigating health insurance may include)*

- ❖ Figuring out and determining patient eligibility coverage for government programs, i.e., insurance plans, Medicare, Medicaid Benefits, and Veteran benefits;
- ❖ Helping patients with applications and other steps to secure medical coverage;
- ❖ Explaining copays and coinsurance to patients;
- ❖ Investigating in-network and out-of-network provider options;
- ❖ Advising patients on selecting health plans and insurance policies;
- ❖ Researching additional potential benefits such as long-term care insurance;
- ❖ Informing patients about wellness benefits such as preventive care and the use of telehealth.

### **Placement Advocacy:** *(services that help patients find placements include)*

- ❖ Assisting patients getting admitted into or discharged from hospitals;

- ❖ Coordinating patient transfers to nursing homes, assisted living, or rehabilitation centers;

**Older Adult Services Advocacy:** *(navigating older adult services includes assistance with)*

- ❖ Home care;
- ❖ Transportation;
- ❖ Meals;
- ❖ Housing.

**Legal Navigation Advocacy:** *(legal navigation include)*

- ❖ Assisting patients with legal concerns and issues, directing them to services;
- ❖ Advocating for patients who receive poor care at a medical facility, hospital, etc.;
- ❖ Helping patients with disability filings and directing them to services;
- ❖ Addressing patient grievances and complaints through mediation;  
*Refer to: DLV Policy for Patient Complaints & Grievance: #01.DLV.COM-GRI Exhibits (A),(B), and(C)-Patient Advocate FORM*
- ❖ Assisting with filing appeals and directing them to services.  
*Refer to: DLV Policy for "PRC's" Reconsideration and Appeal: #01.DLV.REC-APP Exhibits (A),(B), and (C)-Patient Advocate FORM*

**EMPOWER PATIENTS THROUGH PATIENT ADVOCACY:**

Healthcare advocacy can supply comfort, empowerment, and support to patients during challenging times. Given the complex nature of today's healthcare system, patients deserve people with expertise in the corner. Therefore, cultivating the skills and knowledge needed to guide and advocate for our tribal members effectively through compassion.

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