

Help sheet no.30

Involving residents' families, carers and friends

Involving families and friends in the care of residents can provide benefits for carers, residents and staff. Carers can help to make the transition into a residential facility a smooth one for the resident. Being involved may also help the carers adapt to the change in living arrangements.

There are many ongoing benefits from the involvement of family and friends, including improved nutrition and promotion of physical activity.

How to increase family involvement

- Involve carers in developing and reviewing care plans. Carers can provide information about resident meal preferences and recreation interests, particularly where residents have cognitive deficits and memory problems. Encourage the carer to sign the care plan to indicate they accept it.
- Let carers know that they should make themselves feel at home with residents and not feel that they are visiting a patient in hospital.
- Encourage the families and carers of people from diverse backgrounds to share information to enable culturally appropriate care to be provided. Perhaps they can bring in recipes of the person's favourite dish, notify staff of days that hold particular significance for the resident where special or traditional foods may be preferred, or advise on culturally appropriate forms of exercise. Families and carers could also provide in-service sessions to educate staff on customs and approach to personal care.

Some relatives and carers may wish to continue to cook and bring in familiar dishes for the resident. Ensure your food safety program is sensitive to this need and check the requirements with your local council's environmental health officer.

- Involve carers in activities and special events, for example helping to organise a BBQ.
- Allow carers to help with tasks such as meal assisting, especially if they assisted the resident with these tasks before they moved into the facility. Some people may feel they are not allowed to be involved in these tasks. Let them know they are and teach them how. For example, if a resident has suffered a stroke they may have lost some of their speech. Carers and friends may not know how to communicate and will generally begin to reduce their contact with the resident.
- Allow partners to have private time together and respect the need for and benefits of physical contact.
- Encourage family members to participate in activities.
- Encourage family members, carers and friends to take residents on outings if the resident and family member are able.
- Allow family members, carers and friends to decorate their relative's room with photos, and familiar items such as doonas and pictures.
- Invite families, carers and friends to happy hours.

- Provide families, carers and friends the opportunity to make complaints or suggest possible improvements for the facility.
- Carry out a satisfaction survey.

Relatives committees hold regular meetings and make an important contribution to a facility. For example, one committee organised activities and outings including a Melbourne Cup BBQ for residents and families to enjoy and get to know others as well as provide support for each other.

Benefits of involving families, carers and friends

Benefits to residents:

- Residents may feel comforted that people important to them are still available and still care about them. Possible feelings of being deserted can be minimised if family, carers and friends maintain regular contact.
- Seeing family, carers and friends also provides familiarity in a very different environment.
- Families, carers and friends can provide an understanding that can take many years to develop.
- Families, carers and friends also keep residents in touch with the world outside a facility.
- Families, carers and friends provide variety and increase potential for socialising.
- Families, carers and friends can act as advocates for their relative.

Benefits to family, carers and friends:

- Providing care to residents can help people feel needed. For spouses who have been providing care for many years, seeing their partner move into a facility may lead to feelings of failure in their role as a carer and partner. Allowing partners to help in tasks such as meal assistance can help them feel needed again.
- Involving families, carers and friends in activities can allow them to increase quality time with the resident.
- Increasing involvement in the care of the resident can reduce possible feelings of guilt about placing their relative in residential care.
- Families, carers and friends who maintain regular contact, can feel reassured that the person is getting appropriate care and is well looked after. This can help them feel that they have some control as they know what is going on.

Benefits to staff:

- Family, carers and friends involvement can save time for staff as they can assist in personal care tasks and provide supervision. Families may also be able to provide less hurried care as they are contributing to the care of only one resident.
- Involving families, carers and friends and increasing their level of control and

acceptance of the situation can result in reducing anger. Outbursts from family members may reflect feelings of guilt or helplessness.

- Staff can learn more about residents' backgrounds and interests from family, carers and friends.
- Families, carers and friends may have been providing care for many months or years. During this time they have likely developed useful strategies for communicating with the person and ways of encouraging them to perform personal care tasks and other activities. Staff can learn from family, carers and friends.
- Families, carers and friends can provide information about cultural norms and customs.
- Without assistance from families, carers and friends, staff may not have the resources to organise special activities.

[Make sure all staff are aware of the policy guidelines regarding visits in your facility. Do you know the guidelines in relation to physical activity, for example transferring and assisting walking? Are you aware of the regulations on nutrition in relation to families bringing food in \(see \[help sheet 2\]\(#\)\).](#)

Thank you to Catherine Barrett, Melbourne Extended Care and Rehabilitation Centre, for her input into this help sheet.