



*Seniors living healthy.*

## Patient Advocacy

The job of caregiver, though usually unpaid, is one of the most complex and challenging roles anyone will undertake. There is no how-to manual that can adequately coach people on what it takes to keep a loved one safe and well once he or she has serious medical problems.

Whether you have a loved one living with you full-time or you manage his/her care from 3,000 miles away, chances are you will be called at some point to act as that person's advocate. So, along with the responsibilities that many of the more than 35 million caregivers in this country face on a daily basis, such as feeding, cooking, bathing or overseeing hired help, you will also need to be a voice for that person if he/she isn't able to ask crucial questions or find important information.

Physically or mentally impaired older people need advocacy in many areas. Some examples include dealing with housing or transportation offices, the Social Security Administration, and sorting through Medicare and Medicaid. Many seniors are entitled to benefits they are unaware of and need someone

to help them find information on vital programs. Some elders are eligible for reduced or frozen rent rates, reduction of transportation costs and/or specialized transportation to help them remain independent. One important resource is The Piedmont Triad Regional Council Area Agency on Aging (336-761-2111 by phone or online at [www.ptrc.org](http://www.ptrc.org)) for more information on what your loved one may qualify for. Additional information may be obtained at [www.eldercare.gov](http://www.eldercare.gov) and entering your area code.

Perhaps the most important area for advocacy is the health care system. From prescribed medications to medical testing and hospitalizations, studies show that older Americans must be proactive in understanding the health care they receive to protect themselves from errors and injuries. Those who can't do so need someone to speak up on their behalf. To understand how much of an industry medicine is in the United States, please read Steve Brill's excellent article in TIME magazine, March 4, 2013. Available online at:

[www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2136864,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2136864,00.html)

Older people need a good advocate within the health care system. There is no doubt that being hospitalized puts older patients at risk for a whole host of problems, including infections, falls, confusion, weakness and bedsores. In addition, a 2006

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report by the Institute of Medicine revealed that hospitalized Medicare patients experienced an estimated 400,000 preventable injuries each year from adverse drug reactions. Another 800,000 adverse events were found in nursing homes, plus 530,000 more in outpatient settings.

### Advocate Resources

- The Piedmont Triad Regional Council Area Agency on Aging  
336-761-2111 or [www.ptrc.org](http://www.ptrc.org)
- Elder Care Locator [www.eldercare.gov](http://www.eldercare.gov)

One of the major recommendations that came from this study was that “patients and their surrogates should in turn take a more active role in the process . . . to keep careful records of all medications.” Patients and caregivers can cut down on the likelihood of injury by creating a simple medical record that is brought to all doctor’s appointments and hospital admissions.

In addition to harm done by medications, what about all of the interventions that are offered to older patients or those with serious illness? We’ve all heard stories about someone who has had the wrong leg amputated or the wrong kidney removed, and are horrified that such things can still happen despite the high level of care available in this country. These are obvious cases in which people received the wrong care — care that only does them harm. In addition, another study showed a 13 percent increase in the number of procedures done on Medicare patients during their final hospital admission that did not result in a corresponding increase in life expectancy. We have more technology to use at the end of life, but it isn’t always the right choice.

Because of this, it is critical that older persons and those with chronic serious illness (and their advocates) become well informed when treatments and

procedures are being offered. Some important questions to ask are:

- What will be the added benefit of this medication, test or intervention?
- What are the possible side effects?
- Will it affect my ability to function independently?
- What are the possibilities if I choose not to take this medication, have this test or undergo this intervention?

Another important step to take is creating advance directives—a living will, a health care power of attorney, and a MOST form (this was presented in our December 2012 newsletter, available online at [www.myhomevisits.com](http://www.myhomevisits.com)). Discussing these important issues with your loved one will be immensely helpful should the day come that you must make health care decisions on someone else’s behalf.

Sometimes making big medical decisions can seem overwhelming. One place to turn for support if you are grappling with various treatment choices is Physicians Home Visits. Our dedicated team of professionals may not be able to answer every question themselves, but with our years of experience and the relationships built throughout our community we can help to point you in the right direction.

*This article was modified from Patient Advocate: An Important Role for All Caregivers, by Anna Loengard, MD, published November, 2008 by The Center to Advance Palliative Care on its website, [GetPalliativeCare.org](http://GetPalliativeCare.org).*

### Next Month’s Featured Article

The important steps caregivers and patient advocates should take when a patient is discharged.

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## Physicians Home Visits Patient Portal



**HIPAA** is the acronym for the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act that was passed by Congress in 1996. HIPAA does the following:

- Provides the ability to transfer and continue health insurance coverage for millions of American workers and their families when they change or lose their jobs;
- Reduces health care fraud and abuse;
- Mandates industry wide standards for health care information on electronic billing and other processes; and
- **Requires the protection and confidential handling of protected health information.**

We are launching our Patient Portal—your access to your medical information 24/7 via our website. You can review your demographics, lab results, most recent clinical summary, request medication refills, and more.

First, you must call our office to get your username and initial password. We will ask for your email address, as we are required to email this information to you. You will have 24 hours to log in to the portal. If you do not login within the 24-hour period the initial password expires and you will have to call our office for another password.

Physicians Home Visits is unique in that you do not come to our office for healthcare, we come home to you. Therefore, we do not have an in-office kiosk for the portal; our patient portal is via the worldwide web. Due to HIPAA regulations we must protect the privacy of patient records. So for your protection, you must positively identify yourself when you call. If you are a family member you must be on record as the patient's Power of Attorney or prove designation with written permission from the patient.

### Physicians Home Visits Patient Portal

[www.myhomevisits.com](http://www.myhomevisits.com)

#### Office Hours

**M—F 9:00am—5:00pm**

**336-993-3146**

*Annie Davidson will be happy to assist you in obtaining your username and password.*



## Contact Us

We would like to hear from you!

If you have any questions or suggestions, please let us know.

Mail: Physicians Home Visits

3069 Tensest Drive, Suite 200

Winston-Salem, NC 27103

Phone: 336-993-3146

Fax: 336-992-3930

Email: [Info@myhomevisits.com](mailto:Info@myhomevisits.com)

[www.myhomevisits.com](http://www.myhomevisits.com)

Physicians Home Visits is a team of Board Certified Physicians, Nurse Practitioners, nurses and clinical assistants providing primary care for seniors throughout the Piedmont region of North Carolina. We provide comprehensive healthcare centered upon the patient as a whole person. We want to prevent illnesses, promote wellness, provide acute care and manage chronic illnesses, ensuring the patient and caregivers are fully informed in their care plan. In all cases, we use evidence-based medicine and clinical support tools to guide the decisions the patient and family must make.



*Coming home to you.*

### Physicians Home Visits

**Office hours Monday—Friday, 9am—5pm**

**After hours on call**

**336-993-3146**

**[www.myhomevisits.com](http://www.myhomevisits.com)**