

Care Navigators: trusted co-pilots in your health care journey

We've all experienced the anxious feelings that come with finding one's self in unfamiliar territory or trying to manage too many things at one time. Making high-impact decisions and choices when uncertain can be risky and unsettling for even the most confident individual.

Now layer on top of this scenario changing health status, challenges associated with advancing age, or the complexity of a disjointed health care system and one can easily start to feel vulnerable and overwhelmed.

Under such circumstances is it any wonder that promoting one's own health care and wellbeing, or that of a loved ones, can suddenly become an exercise in frustration and despair?

Enter into the picture the Care Navigator and Advocacy Specialist. These professionals often have clinical or social work background and experience and are non-medical partners in the management and promotion of one's personal health and wellbeing.

Care Navigator and Advocate Specialists provide a vital and proactive link between different parts of the system. They are both a first point of contact for patients, caring family, friends, and health care professionals, as well as actively guide patients and coordinate their journey through the care system.

One of the most powerful aspects of the Care Navigator and Advocate's role is that they have the benefit of getting to know and work with their clients where ever they live. This gives them a more holistic understanding of the person, their environment, how they are coping, and insight into what is important to them.

The Care Navigator and Advocate's role is broad and varied, delivering both practical service and emotional or psychological support. The types of services a Care Navigator and Advocate might provide include:

- research and help with access to a variety of both medical and non-medical services
- attend healthcare appointments with a client to help with clarity and understanding and to ensure their wishes are being heard
- ensure follow-through on care directives
- educate and support the client through informed decision-making
- respond quickly to emerging problems and help divert crisis
- communicate and liaise with concerned family, locally or abroad

A key and critical question, of course, is what is the impact and value of the community-based care navigator role on individuals and families? A recent 2015 and 2016 study out of the United Kingdom may offer some helpful insight on this question. When patients there were surveyed about their experience working with a Care Navigator, the following outcomes were noted:

- 67% reported an overall improved patient experience
- 68% of respondents felt the service was effective at reducing the amount of time they visited medical hubs or offices with non-medical matters
- 93% of patients felt they had gained access to the right information to help with their issue
- 49% were able to gain direct access services
- 84% experienced improvements to their overall wellbeing

Fortunately, the role of the Care Navigator and Advocate is becoming more accepted and understood. It has the ability to fill an important need in our communities. It can empower those who are feeling vulnerable, it can offer relief to caregivers who are shouldering the care responsibility of another, and it can improve one's overall sense of wellbeing and quality of life.

You are invited to find out more about Care Navigation and Advocacy at one of our upcoming free information sessions in March.

Jennifer Moir is an Elder Planning Counselor, Certified Relocation and Transition Specialist, and owner of Ottawa-based Age Well Solutions. Age Well Solutions will be hosting two information sessions on the topic of Care Navigation and Advocacy on Monday, March 25 from 7:00-8:30pm at Rideau Park United Church, 2203 Alta Vista Dr., as well as on Wednesday March 27th from 10:00- 11:30am at the Alta Vista Branch of the Ottawa Library at 2516 Alta Vista Drive. No charge to attend Free parking. RSVP by calling 613.277.6449 or email info@agewellsolutions.ca. Visit www.agewellsolutions.ca for more information.