



Health Information and Education Center

How to Advocate for Yourself in the Healthcare

Benefits System

For a lot of people, it's tough to be your own advocate. It can be an intimidating process, but often we have no choice but to advocate for ourselves. Outcomes will be better, if you take the time to prepare before meetings, phone calls or visits with health care providers or others in this system.

Here's what you'll need to do to prepare yourself to advocate:

- Know the facts. Review any paperwork that you have received or submitted. Make note of key dates and as many of the important details as possible. Knowing your case well can put you way ahead of everyone else. If you are appealing your health plan's denial of a service, read the denial carefully to see why they are denying it. Use their reason as the basis for your argument to say why you should get the service.
- **Keep good records.** When you make a call about your insurance issue, take note of whom you talked to, the date and time, and what the conversation was about. Keep copies of all correspondence, both what you send and what you receive.
- Do your research. If your health plan is denying you a service or medication, search the Internet for information about the service and why it is medically necessary or appropriate for your condition. Print out what you find and include it as part of your grievance or appeal.
- Practice what you want to say in advance. Tell your story to a friend or family member and ask for feedback.

Figure out your bottom line. If there might be a compromise position, decided in advance how much you are willing to compromise or whether you are willing to compromise at all.

When you advocate your position:

- Tell your story. You lived it, so you know it best. Be organized and communicate

the facts in a logical way.

- Stick to the important points. Figure out what is most important for the other person to hear and relay the information as concisely as possible.
- Concede the negative points. If there are negative things about your case, explain what occurred. You can take the impact out of the bad points and make them less negative.
- Be respectful. But firm. You will lose points in your case by being disrespectful of the other side. If the people opposed to you are disrespectful, the decision maker will notice this, but you keep your cool. Keep your focus on the story that you are telling. Have your evidence with you. Bring all relevant documents with you when you go to advocate your case. Make copies for the other side and for the decision maker ahead of time.

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The Right Question

We need good information to make informed decisions as we find our way through the health care system. The best way to get information is to ask questions and listen to the answers. Asking "the right question" will help get specific information and may help to open discussions about possibilities. Thinking about the questions you need to ask and writing them down helps you get the information you need.

Closed-Ended Questions get a yes or no answer.

Can this medicine be used safely with all my other medications and therapies?

Open-Ended Questions create discussions and provide more specific details.

What are the possible side effects? What do I do if a side effect occurs?

To Contact FVND call 888-522-9654; fvnd@drtel.net; www.fvnd.org

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