



# HEALTH MATTERS

## How Families Matter In Health: Developing A Family-Friendly Practice

(NAPSA)—Visiting a health care provider truly is a family affair. It's estimated family members accompany 35 percent of all patients on outpatient visits and are present on virtually all visits to a pediatrician.

Since this is the case, some health care providers are recognizing the need to work together with a family as a team.

According to experts, one of the characteristics of a family-friendly medical practice is that it always views the patient in the context of the family.


According to Edward L. Schor, M.D., FAAP, "You may be able to treat illness without knowing what is going on at home, but it will be easier to care for the patient if you understand the family. You can learn from the family."

Professionals may have a greater impact as healers if they include the family in developing the plan for care at home and praise the family for following the plan. Some believe this 'family friendly' approach may lead to better health outcomes.

Family members are often unrecognized for their role in the patient's recovery, yet the moment the patient and the caregiver leave the office, providing care becomes the family's responsibility. Said Carol Levine, Director of Families and Healthcare Project, United Hospital Fund of New York, "We talk about the system. Caregivers are the system. We talk about community care. Caregivers are the community care."

Despite the fact that in millions of households, care is needed for a person with a chronic condition—cancer, AIDS, multiple sclerosis, diabetes, arthritis, Alzheimer's

### Recognizing Family-Friendly Health Care

- Are patients always viewed in the context of their families or support systems?
- Is respect for the family members' participation communicated to them?
- Is information available for family members about care?
- Are families complimented when they are providing good care?
- Are community and neighborhood resources made available to families? 

disease and others—treatment guidelines rarely offer advice on how to include caregivers.

Levine recently observed that family caregivers often have to take on the role of a first-year hospital resident—except without the experience or training.

According to Lenora Poe, Ph.D., a marriage, family and child therapist, the struggle of caring for an ill family member can send ripple effects throughout a family, stressing marriages and other relationships and leading to problems with children, who may perceive a lack of attention from the preoccupied caregiver.

Said Dr. Poe, "We look at relationships as one person being the receiver and the other the giver. Illness sets the family out of balance. It changes everything."

Family-friendly health care providers investigate these ripple effects because they understand the way an illness in one individual can affect the entire family. Even in well functioning families, hidden problems may emerge under the stress of illness.

Increasingly, family-friendly health care providers are helping families recognize and access other sources of help and support for their new role.

Some are finding that faith-based outreach programs are a resource that can support the family in their caregiving duties.

In other cases, traditional medical facilities are adapting to empower and support families. The Family Resource Center at the Children's Hospital in Philadelphia has the mission of reducing stress by educating families about procedures after discharge.

Other suggestions include having hospitals schedule visiting hours that reflect family needs—such as visits after 5 pm—or having more than one chair in an examination room.

Programs such as these, that value and nurture the role of the family as caregiver, may be pointing toward a new era in health care and caregiving.

To learn more about family-friendly practices as well as other topical subjects, read "How Families Matter In Health," the current edition of **The Pfizer Journal**.

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