

If your Partner / Relative is in Hospital

Having a loved one in hospital can be a difficult time for anyone. When you are ill yourself, it doesn't get any easier, the more so if you are too unwell to be able to go to visit your friend or relative at the hospital.

Chances are that, sooner or later, most people with a long term severe illness will find themselves in this situation. With this in mind I have put together some helpful tips and guidance.

- Just because you can't visit doesn't mean you can't contribute in many ways to your friend or relative's stay – someone for them to ring for a chat, a voice for them. They know you care.
- If the person in hospital is under a specialist doctor, it's a good idea to take the initiative to make the doctor aware of your situation, if possible. It can be helpful if you need to speak with them in future.
- With your relative / partner's permission, (consent) you can ask to speak directly with the consultant. To do this, ring the hospital switchboard and ask to be put through to the consultant's secretary and ask to arrange to speak to the consultant.
- The hospital can supply essentials like pyjamas, towels, and soap to patients so you don't need to worry if you can't get to the hospital to provide these things yourself.
- If the patient has a bedside television, free calls to landlines can be included in the price of a day's TV viewing, so that you can talk and maintain contact – beneficial to both you and them.
- The chaplaincy team is there to provide emotional support to both of you. They provide a friendly face and a chat even if you don't have a faith.
- If you have faith, when the chaplain visits ask them to have the phone and pray together.
- If you have questions which you wish to put to the doctor in the event of an emergency, and there isn't the opportunity to share these via a visitor, the chaplaincy team may be willing to take them down over the phone and then take them to your relative.
- If you are unhappy about any aspect of your relative's care trying speaking to the nurse in charge of the ward. If the problem is not resolved contact the Patient Advice Liaison Service (PALS) and explain the problem. Their job is to liaise with relevant people to sort out the problem. You can contact PALS via the hospital main switchboard.
- Similarly, if you are unhappy about your relative's care an efficient way to resolve matters can be to ring the Chief Executive's Office and speak to a member of staff. They will try to resolve the matter. Do not be afraid to do this nor feel you need to keep this option only as last resort.
- Finally - look after yourself, it will be a testing time for you too. Bear in mind any additional care needs you may have.

Helen Baxter
Advocacy worker

Helen has kindly put together some further notes, which will help support members when a close friend or relative is terminally ill and after someone close dies. If you would like a copy of these please contact the office or look at the 25% ME Group website.