

Setting realistic expectations in senior living communities



A Senior Living Communities are no longer just admitting the resident. The communities are also admitting the family and/or significant others, and all of the baggage that goes with those relationships. Those family members are here to stay and so is the importance of having a process in place to train staff on educating and setting realistic expectations in order to deal with those difficult situations and family members.

Managing difficult family relationships begins before admission to the facility with the screening process. Moving into a Senior Living Community can be very intimidating and overwhelming for both the resident and the family members. Many families do not understand the type of services or levels of care offered at the Senior Living Community or what to expect from the caregivers when they bring their loved one to the community.

Having realistic brochures, handouts and websites which are accurate about the services provided, supportable and not overstated is the first step to setting realistic expectations. Some Senior Living Communities have a tendency to make unqualified claims concerning their services or products, which leads to making promises they cannot keep and eventually will lead to family distrust of the community.

Setting realistic expectations with the resident and family members once a pre-screen evaluation has been completed will help determine if the resident is an appropriate fit for the Senior Living Community and the services/level of care provided there. Next, provide the resident and family with education on the resident's disease processes during the admission process so the resident and family can make an informed decision on the resident's care. Setting realistic expectations will also provide the family with the risk factors associated with the disease process and inform the family on the potential negative consequences associated with the disease. Additionally, it will help prepare the family when there is a decline in the resident's health, or any adverse events happen to the resident. Finally, document what education has been provided and the acknowledgement that the family understood the information provided and the potential adverse events associated with the disease.

Review the diagnosis information when there is a significant change of the resident's condition and during the care planning process. This allows both the resident and family members an opportunity to ask questions on how the community treats the disease management and the services available to meet the resident's needs.

In conclusion, managing resident and family expectations takes time; however, setting realistic expectations not only assists with managing the risk, but it also fosters a level of trust with the resident and family.

Below are other resources which may assist your Senior Living Community with this process:

- National Library of Medicine, "The Nature of Staff-Family Interactions in Nursing Homes: Staff Perceptions"; <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2711636/>
- McKnights Senior Living, "Establishing expectations, policies key to avoiding lawsuits in senior living"; <https://www.mcknightsseniorliving.com/home/news/establishing-expectations-policies-key-to-avoiding-lawsuits-in-senior-living/>
- Hanson Bridgett, "Just the Facts, Ma'am: Realistic Expectations for Current and Future Residents"; <https://www.hansonbridgett.com/-/media/Files/Publications/Just-the-Facts-Maam-Realistic-Expectations-for-Current-and-Future-Residents.pdf>

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