

# COMMUNICATING *with the* MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT TEAM

Outcomes are best for **everyone** involved when the individual, mental health treatment team, families, friends and other allies in recovery are working together effectively and efficiently. It is important that each person feels prepared for appointments with treatment providers. Preparing for appointments in advance can help to ensure the appointment goes smoothly, decrease any feelings of nervousness, and maximize the benefits of the time together. Preparing for appointments ahead of time might include things like preparing questions, providing input about goals and treatment plan, updating a medication list and including benefits observed or side effects, and organizing the information to be shared.

## HELPFUL TIPS FOR PREPARING TO MEET WITH TREATMENT TEAM MEMBERS



**Prepare an agenda.**<sup>1</sup> This is empowering and helps everyone to think about and define immediate goals and ensure needs are met during the appointment.

**Organize thoughts and concerns.**<sup>1</sup> Prior to an appointment, think through questions, concerns and information that you would like to share. Not only does this maximize the benefits of the time spent with a provider, but it can also help to build confidence by feeling prepared and decreasing concerns that you might forget to share an important piece of information or to ask a pressing question during the appointment. Prioritize your list to ensure you have time to address the most pressing questions or concerns.

**Be specific.**<sup>1</sup> Be as specific as possible with questions, concerns and information to share with the treatment provider. Include as much concrete information as possible. For example, which symptoms have increased or decreased in the past week? What progress has been made toward a specified goal?



**Write questions down and bring them to the appointment.**<sup>1</sup> Bringing written questions will be helpful to both you and the provider. Questions might include things related to goals, planning for next steps, employment opportunities, the rationale for a particular therapeutic strategy, or information about medication.

Questions related to medications are common. When meeting with the psychiatrist, physician assistant or nurse practitioner, you may want to ask questions like<sup>2</sup>:

- Please tell me why I am taking this medication and what changes or improvements I can expect and by when.
- Would you please tell me how to take these medications correctly? Would you please write out these instructions so that I do not forget or get confused?
- What side effects might occur, and what do I do if I experience a side effect?
- How many refills do I have?
- What should I look for to know the treatment is working?
- What is the plan if the medications do not work?
- How can I reach you, or someone in your office, if I have questions or concerns about this medication?

If you are considering starting a new medication, some additional questions you may want to ask include<sup>1</sup>:

- How will I know if this medication is working?
- How long before I should start to notice an effect from this medication?
- What are the side effects of this medication? If I experience any side effects, what should I do?
- How can I reach you, or someone in your office, if I have questions or concerns when first starting this medication?



**Role play.**<sup>1</sup> It can be helpful to practice how an appointment might go and what you would like to say before meeting with a specific provider. Sometimes talking through goals and questions with someone you trust ahead of time can help you to organize your thoughts and help you feel empowered and prepared.

## HELPFUL TIPS FOR MEETING WITH TREATMENT PROVIDERS

In addition to preparing for the appointment ahead of time, these are things you can do during the appointment:

- **Review your list.** Go over your list of questions, concerns and information you would like to share.
- **Take notes.** Have a notebook and pen to take notes.<sup>1</sup>
- **Audio-record the meeting.**<sup>1</sup> This allows you to review the information later and ensure you did not miss any important details. Explain to the treatment team member your reason for wanting to record the meeting, and request permission before recording.<sup>1</sup>
- **Let the provider know you created an agenda.** Bring a copy for the provider and try to keep the information to one page.<sup>1</sup> Share it at the start of the appointment. How does this agenda align with the provider's goals for the meeting?
- **Have a trusted loved one join the appointment.**<sup>1</sup> It can be very helpful to have another set of ears when meeting with a provider. Not only can this person help to relay information and observations during the appointment, but they can serve as an advocate. They can also be a helpful source of information following the appointment to ensure no one missed or misheard important information.
- **Be respectful but persistent when sharing or gathering information.** Do not be afraid to advocate for yourself or your family member or friend. Get involved in developing the treatment plan and goals. Share information and observations. Ask about new treatments that may be available.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Deegan, P. (n.d.) *Reclaiming your power during medication appointments with your psychiatrist*. Retrieved October 12, 2020, from [power2u.org/reclaiming-your-power-during-medication-appointments-with-your-psychiatrist/](http://power2u.org/reclaiming-your-power-during-medication-appointments-with-your-psychiatrist/).

<sup>2</sup>Hupp, D. & Borovicka, M. (2020). *Roadmap from Hospital to Home: A Guidebook for Loved Ones Involved in a Network of Care (LINC)*. Unpublished manual.

<sup>3</sup>Glynn, S.M. (2014). *NAVIGATE, Family Education Program (FEP)*. Unpublished manual. Downloaded from [navigateconsultants.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/FE-Manual.pdf](http://navigateconsultants.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/FE-Manual.pdf).

