

This story is in regards to my mom, a 79-year old woman who lives in MA and has aphasia, which causes difficulty for my mom to speak and comprehend complex information. In February 2011, my mom fell and broke a vertebrae in her back. She was admitted to the hospital for a few days until she was fitted for a back brace. During this time, the medical team came in and spoke to my mom early in the morning when a family member was not there. I asked to speak to her Doctor and they sent the Doctor who was on call, not the admitting Doctor who was responsible for my mom's care.

We knew my mom would be in a back brace for three months. Other than that, we were given very little additional information about what would happen after discharge and potential next steps. There was no discharge meeting or written instructions. I assume they told my mom information, but she did not understand and was not able to communicate the information to us. In the best of times, it is difficult for my mom to speak. With the trauma of a broken vertebrae, my mom was in no condition to be the one receiving information and instructions from the medical team.

Once she was fitted for the brace, within two hours, my mom was discharged and transferred to a rehabilitation hospital. While there, we asked who was in charge of determining when my mom's brace could come off. The information was not included with the documents sent by the hospital and no one knew the answer. The rehab facility made some inquiries and found out who the Doctor was. No information about a date for a follow up appointment or next steps were provided.

Prior to my mom's discharge from the rehab facility, I asked the Case Manager to schedule a family meeting with her healthcare team which included her Rehab Doctor, PT, OT and Speech Therapist. The Case Mgr told me that they typically only scheduled family meetings for patients who had "more complex health conditions". She went on to say that my mom's condition was complex to us, but relatively speaking to their other patients, she is not. I insisted and the Case Mgr did schedule a family meeting, which was extremely valuable for me and my siblings to understand my mom's condition more fully so we could be a more empowered advocate for the continuation of her care.

My mom was transferred from the rehab hospital to a nursing and rehabilitation center. After a few weeks, we were told that my mom was no longer progressing so Medicare would no longer pay for her to stay there. My mom needed someone to assist her with taking off her brace at night and putting it on every time she had to go to the bathroom during the night. I asked the coordinator at the rehab center if Medicare paid for this type of care at home and was told "no". My mom was being discharged and we just had to figure it out.

Thankfully, my mom had purchased Long Term Care Insurance and was able to be reimbursed for a home health aide to stay with her during the night. I am appalled that my mom would be discharged and there isn't a system in place to ensure she receives the care required for her medical needs.

After my mom was home, we made an appointment at the original admitting hospital with the Doctor to get information about my mom, her condition and the criteria for taking the brace off. This was the only way for us to be informed about my mom's medical status.