

Patient and Family Advisory Councils

Effective October 1, 2010, all acute, chronic, and long term care hospitals in Massachusetts are required to establish a Patient and Family Advisory Council (PFAC). The purpose of these Councils is for patient and family members to advise the hospital on matters including, but not limited to, patient and provider relationships, institutional review boards, quality improvement initiatives, and patient education on safety and quality matters to the extent allowed by state and federal law.

Patient and Family Advisory Councils serve as the "patient voice" and the institutional infrastructure for including the patient and family member perspective in hospital organizational decision-making. Councils are typically comprised of patients, family members, executive leadership, and staff, working in partnership to assure the delivery of the highest standard of comprehensive and compassionate care is delivered at each hospital. They may include:

- Providing information to hospital leaders and staff about patients' needs and concerns;
- Helping plan patient-care areas and new programs;
- Making changes that affect patients and family members;
- Encouraging patients and families to be involved and to speak up;
- Strengthening communication among patients, family members, caregivers, and staff.

Timeline

- No later than September 30, 2009, hospitals must have a written report outlining the hospital's plan to establish a Council by October 1, 2010.
- Hospitals shall establish a Council no later than October 1, 2010.
- No later than October 1, 2010 and annually thereafter, a hospital shall prepare a written report documenting the hospital's compliance with this requirement and describing the Council's accomplishments during the preceding year.

Membership

Membership in a PFAC is determined by each hospital. The requirements of each Council are:

- The Council will meet at least quarterly and will develop and implement written policies and procedures of the Council.
- Minutes of Council meetings including Council accomplishments shall be transmitted to the hospital's governing body.
- At least 50% of the Council members shall be current or former patients or family members and should be representative of the community served by the hospital.
 - Orientation, training, and continuing education must be provided to Council members
- The hospital will make their Work Plan (due September 30, 2009) as well as the PFAC's Annual Report documenting the hospital's compliance and describing their accomplishments publicly available through electronic or other means.

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health recommends (not required)

- The chair or co-chairs be current or former patient(s) or family member(s), or a staff person and a patient or family member.

How to Get Involved

If you are a patient, parent, or family member of a patient who has received care at a particular hospital and are interested in learning more about that hospital's Council, please contact the hospital directly.

The Massachusetts Coalition for the Prevention of Medical Errors is providing audio conference calls and support to hospitals to help with the development and implementation of PFACs.