The mission statement of virtually every hospital in the United States is to improve the health of individuals and communities. This is evident in the manifestation of the Triple Aim for the U.S. health care system, a framework developed by the Institute for Healthcare Improvement. This framework includes three dimensions: improve the health of the population and our communities, improve the individual care experience and reduce or control the per capita cost of health care. Patients and families are important stakeholders in health care, because they have the most at stake and a growing body of evidence shows that their engagement leads to better health care outcomes.

In January 2013, the AHA Committee on Research released Engaging Health Care Users: A Framework for Healthy Individuals and Communities (http://www.aha.org/research/cor/engaging/index.shtml) which provides a framework, strategies and leading case studies on best practices for patient and family engagement.

“The health care system is adapting to the ever-changing needs and demands of health care users. Patients, family and community engagement has the potential to be a “game changer” in health care delivery.”

Benjamin K. Chu, M.D.
Chair of the AHA’s Board of Trustees

Why it is important to engage patients and families in their health care

- Patients who are engaged in their own health care have better clinical outcomes.
- Patients who are engaged in their own health care have lower costs of care.
- Patients who are well informed of their medical condition are more likely to adhere to their provider’s recommended regimen.
- Physicians, hospitals, ACOs and health plans are being judged by and reimbursed according to their patient’s satisfaction with the care coordination experience across clinical settings.
- Patient and family engagement is a key requirement included in HI-TECH Meaningful Use, Patient-Centered Medical Homes, and Accountable Care Organizations.
As health care provider organizations search for ways to improve care outcomes while simultaneously lowering costs, the concept of patient and family engagement has become a priority. Patient and family engagement is defined as:

A set of beliefs and behaviors by patients, family members, and health professionals and a set of organizational policies, procedures and interventions that ensure both the inclusion of patients and families as central members of the healthcare team and active partnerships with providers and provider organizations.¹

There are a number of different patient and family engagement strategies. These include:

- Providing patients and families real-time access to medical records
- Conducting bedside rounds with patients and families involved
- Engaging patients and families in shared clinical decision making
- Providing patients self-management support
- Engaging patients and families in hospital advisory councils

Patients, families and health care professionals each come with their own knowledge, experiences, beliefs, preferences and values. Health care professionals work in an organizational context which influences their actions while at the same time health care professionals influence their organizations. The goal is for the health care professionals and the organizations in which they work to engage patients and families with a range of interventions that are appropriate to their clinical context. If this happens consistently, it is expected that it will contribute to each of these outcomes:

- Elimination of preventable harm
- Patients and families’ dignity and respect is preserved
- Clinical decisions made will be concordant with patients’ values and preferences
- Unnecessary health care costs will be eliminated

Supporting hospital efforts to rapidly deploy effective patient and family engagement strategies requires collecting credible data that documents the extent of the progress hospitals have made in engaging their patients and evidence that links effective patient and family engagement to priority outcomes for hospitals such as improved patient outcomes, patient satisfaction and reduced resource use.

COMING SOON!!


HRET, with funding from the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, is developing a survey of hospital leaders to obtain credible answers to these questions. The survey will be fielded this summer. We encourage you to complete and return the survey once you receive it. The results of the survey will inform efforts hospitals can undertake to speed the implementation of effective approaches for patient and family engagement. Tailored reports will be available to all hospitals that participate in the survey comparing their use of patient and family engagement strategies with those of similar respondents, and to all participating hospitals completing the survey.