TIPS FOR HOW TO BE AN EFFECTIVE PATIENT OR FAMILY ADVISOR: A BEGINNING LIST

• Believe that your investment in your own health experiences or your family members’ will help you in making a difference for others.
• Develop good communication skills.
• Listen with empathy.
• Be honest.
• Be available.
• Ask questions.
• Be open-minded.
• Avoid assumptions. Don’t make quick judgments about people.
• Learn to be comfortable with staff and other patients and families.
• Educate other patients and families.
• Be willing to partner with other patients, family members, and staff.
• Learn negotiating skills. Be a team player. Think about the points you want to make.
• Adapt to different situations.
• Take responsibility for learning and strengthening your skills.
• Give input based on your own experience but be able to step out of your individual perspective.
• Do not deal with personal issues in advisory activities. Ask for assistance if you have had an experience that is bothering you.
• Share your own story or be clear if it is someone else’s experience.
• When talking about an experience that did not go well, don’t just complain – offer suggestions on how it could have been made better.
• Think carefully about the words you use. Anger is not productive. If you want to share a story that brings up strong emotions, ask a peer to help you develop your story.
• When speaking to a group, thank them for asking for your input and perspective.
• Support staff.
• Be willing to partner with staff.
• Honor commitments—when you say you are going to do something—follow through.
• Take risks.
• Have faith. Expect the best.
• Stick to it.
• Ask for help or support from other advisors when you need it. Do the same for others.
• If you find that you are having difficulty balancing your personal and/or professional life with advisory activities, ask to take a leave of absence or give up some responsibilities.

Source: Patient and family advisors and health care professionals attending previous IPFCC intensive training seminars.