



Supporting someone
with breathlessness

Talking to the healthcare team

Sometimes it can feel challenging to communicate with the patient's healthcare team.

This can be because:

...some carers and patients may not feel their needs have been heard by the healthcare team

...some carers and patients may not want to ask too many questions, worrying they may be taking up the healthcare team's time

...some carers and patients don't understand what their healthcare team is saying to them and don't feel comfortable to say so

...some carers feel left out of decisions about the patient's care

It's important that you feel able to explain your concerns and needs, and the needs of the patient, to the healthcare team. It's also important to understand what the team are saying to you, to make sure the patient gets the best possible care, and that you feel supported.

*"You think the professional's time is so important but it's so important that you (the carer) get it right"
– 'Lisa', former carer*

Speaking to healthcare professionals

Here are some suggestions that can help you get the best out of appointments and conversations with the healthcare team:

- Give yourself permission to ask questions – as a carer you need to feel sure you have understood what they are telling you, so that you can feel confident when caring for the patient
- Make a list of any questions you and the patient have and take these with you to appointments
- You might like to ask the questions that are most important to you first



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- You may have to ask the same question more than once – especially if it is important to you – so that you are sure about the answer
- You might like to keep a note of what was talked about in appointments
- If you have been told that the patient is having palliative care, it can help to mention this to make sure that everyone in the healthcare team is aware of what type of support the patient might need

If you're talking with the healthcare team and you are not sure you understand what has been said, you could say something like:

- *'Could you please explain that again as I'm not quite following you? Understanding this will help me support [patient] better'*
- *'Can I just explain back to you what I think you mean to check that I understand correctly?'*
- *'I'm not quite following what you are saying, can you just go over that again please?'*
- *'Can I just check what we have planned? So that it is really clear in our minds?'*
- *'Is there some more information that we can read or look at to help us with this?'*



Sometimes there are questions that you may want to ask that the patient may not want to hear the answer to. You could check any questions you have for the healthcare team with the patient beforehand to find this out.

You need to be aware that sometimes there are things about the patient that the healthcare team can't talk to you about without the patient's permission.

Generally healthcare professionals are happy to answer carers' questions if they are about the carer themselves, or how they can help the patient. For example, a question such as 'how can I help him/her to eat more?'



Feeling left out of important conversations

Sometimes carers can feel left out of some important conversations about the patient by the healthcare team. Try using the word 'we' when speaking with healthcare professionals in appointments. Using the word 'we' can help remind everyone that you and the patient are a team – you are in this together.

Remember there are times when the healthcare team can't speak to carers about the patient, without the patient's permission.

Have a look at our videos

There is a video on this topic on the website that you may find useful:

- ['Talking with your healthcare team'](#) where you can see healthcare professionals discuss ways that carers can make the most of appointments in order to get the best possible care for patients