



Supporting Family Council Development



● ● ● | Importance of Family Councils



- Provide a link to the community outside the facility
- A buffer for families having problems with the administration
- Can provide needed validation for families
- Strength in numbers when raising grievances with the facility



Family Councils:

- Can help resolve issues at the facility level before outside resources are needed
- Through their day to day experience, families may see things others may not
- Families may be more able to advocate than frail residents



Benefits of Independent, *Family-Led* Family Councils

- Open Communication
 - Voice concerns openly
 - Facilities get honest feedback
- Purpose
 - Focus on common, facility-wide concerns
- Empowerment
 - Protected under federal law
 - Come up with creative and positive contributions
 - Bring about change

Rights of Family Councils in Federal Regulation

1987 Nursing Home Reform Regulations section 483.15(c):

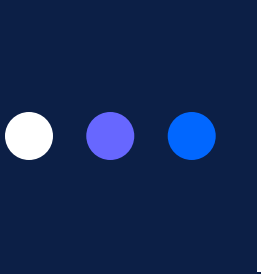
- A resident's family has the right to meet in the facility with the families of other residents
- The facility must provide family groups with private meeting space





Rights of Family Councils in Federal Regulations

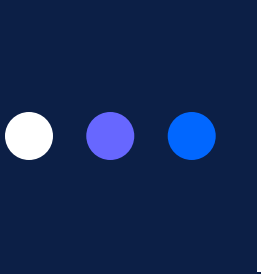
- Staff or visitors may attend meetings *at the group's invitation*
- Facility must provide a *designated staff person* to provide assistance and respond to written requests from family council meetings
- Facility must *listen to the views and act upon the grievances and recommendations of families* concerning proposed policy and operational decisions affecting resident care and life in the facility



Rights of Family Councils in Federal Guidance

Interpretive Guidelines – F244:

- This guideline does not require that family members organize a family group. However, when families wish to organize, facilities must allow them to do so without interference.
- The facility must provide the group with space, privacy for meetings, and staff support.
- Normally, the designated staff person responsible for assistance and liaison between the group and the facility's administration and any other staff members *attend the meeting only if requested*.



Rights of Family Councils in Federal Guidance

- A “resident’s or family group” is defined as a group that meets regularly to:
 - Discuss and offer suggestions about facility policies and procedures affecting residents’ care, treatment, and quality of life
 - Support each other
 - Plan resident and family activities
 - Participate in educational activities; or
 - Any other purpose



Rights of Family Councils in Federal Guidance

- The *facility is required to listen to family group recommendations and grievances. Acting upon these issues does not mean that the facility must accede to all group recommendations, but the facility must seriously consider the group's recommendations and must attempt to accommodate those recommendations, to the extent practicable, in developing and changing facility policies affecting resident care and life in the facility. The facility should communicate its decisions to the family group.*

Key Components of Family Councils

Recruitment

- Conduct continual recruitment
(more later in the presentation on this)





Key Components of Family Councils

Leadership within the Council

- Plan for long-term stability of the group by putting structure in place – i.e. simple by-laws
- Work on leadership development
- Invite family members of residents who die to continue on the council *if the council wishes*



Key Components of Family Councils

Relationship with facility and staff

- Councils should communicate continually with facility staff and administration:
 - Common concerns and suggestions
 - Follow up on actions to be taken
 - Discussion of family council activities
- Councils should be part of the solution to problems or improvements to be made at the facility when possible
- When raising concerns:
 - Brainstorm ideas for addressing the concern
 - Be in regular communication with the long-term care ombudsman



Key Components of Family Councils

Improvement of the family council function

- In meetings:
 - Focus on common goals
 - Follow procedures for effective meetings
 - Use agendas, stick to timeframes, assign tasks for activities needing movement before the next meeting
- Evaluate meetings to make sure the purpose has been accomplished. Look for ways to improve.
- Become educated about laws and regulations that apply to nursing homes and affect residents



Key Components of Family Councils

Thoughtfulness within Councils

- Family Council members should remember that the council may not produce immediate results but can be effective with perseverance
- Focus initially on achievable goals and projects
- Family councils can consider acting as a resource for newly forming family councils at other facilities



How to Support Existing Councils

- Opportunity for ombudsmen to develop a relationship with families - family councils will benefit!
- Ombudsmen must empower family councils, not take charge
- Show Support and Encouragement
 - Be a visible presence in the facility
 - Make an effort to get to know family council leadership and council members
 - Act as a go-between for residents, families, and administration
 - Attend meetings personally when requested, act as a resource person



How to Support Existing Councils

o Assist in Promotion

- Encourage family members to attend council meetings
- Provide support and suggestions at each phase of council development
- Encourage continued support for councils by family members and the facility despite changes in leadership and membership, and facility turnover





How to Support Existing Councils

Education

You Can:

- Provide general information and guidance to family members on federal laws and residents' rights
- Be available as an advocate
- Educate family members about their right to organize a council and the benefits of family councils



How to Support Existing Councils

Education (cont.)

You Can:

- Provide information about what other councils are doing and names of resource people at other facilities
- Share information on innovative practices at other facilities
- Share information about what has or hasn't worked for councils at other facilities



How to Help Get Family Councils Started

- Workshops (county-wide/facility level)
- One-on-one contact (through complaints or during your visits at facility)
- Attending “family forum” meetings or “family nights”
- Identify a family leader and pitch idea or offer support
- Presentations to facility staff about family councils, their rights, and the benefits



Promotion with Facility Staff / Administration

Appeal to home's self-interest

(common concerns addressed together)

- Encourage facility response to council concerns
- Ask the council to share minutes with you or with facility staff, if the family council is comfortable with this
 - Creates openness and transparency
 - Family council not seen as subversive and secretive
- Educate facility about the benefits of family-led family councils



Promoting Participation

- Admissions packets
 - Include information about the council
 - Include a permission slip to allow release of new families' contact information to the council
 - Produce brochures or fliers that can be given to family members
- Sponsor social events to meet new family members
- Establish a “buddy system” – pairing up existing families with new families
- Visit a new resident and their family soon after admission to share information about the council
- Fliers, newsletter, bulletin board in the lobby



Promoting Participation

- Form personal contacts through introductions at council meetings
- Sign in sheet at meetings for contact information for future meetings
- Phone tree to notify family council members about future meetings
- Appoint or elect family members to act as floor/unit representatives to recruit new members and advertise meetings
- Don't get discouraged!

Effective Meetings

- Group Input
 - Discussion and brainstorming without facility staff present
- Structure
 - Agenda
 - Time limits: 1-1.5 hours
 - Regular meeting time
 - Meeting procedures
 - i.e. flip charts, timer, index cards for top issues





Effective Meetings

- Focus on action and efficiency
 - Formulate solutions/recommendations for concerns raised. Formulate a specific request for how a concern should be addressed.
 - Before the end of each meeting plot out next steps, review action items, delegate tasks.
 - Rotate responsibility among members for bringing refreshments.



Effective Advocacy – In Sum:

- Common concerns
- Building relationships
- Being specific and coming to clear agreements
- Following up in writing



Overcoming Obstacles

Fear of retaliation?

- Present the family council positively to both family members and nursing home personnel
- Point out that issues and concerns will be presented to facility administration as a group, not an individual, concern
- Explain that family council members give each other support and strength
- If family members are reluctant to be seen at family council meetings, discuss the possibility of meeting off-site at times

Overcoming Obstacles

Lack of Family Council Effectiveness?

You Can:

- Provide information
- Encourage organization
- Encourage follow up/specificity





Overcoming Obstacles

Lack of Time?

It is important to:

- Begin and end meetings on time.
Meetings should be efficient and purposeful.
- Use agendas.
- Schedule meetings at times convenient for family members.
- Share leadership and assign small tasks to members.



Overcoming Obstacles

Council Members get discouraged easily?

- Pick short and long term achievable goals
 - i.e.: Long-term goal – consistent assignment
Short-term goal – mirrors in the bathroom at wheelchair height; allowing residents to help determine activities and outings
- Meet at least once a month to assure continuity and identify tasks to work toward meeting goals





Overcoming Obstacles

Lack of Response from Facility?

The Council should:

- Know the rights guaranteed to them by federal regulation
- Communicate constantly with the facility and try to respond to concerns the facility may have
- Have a few leaders meet separately with the nursing home administration to introduce the council and its purpose in a positive manner



Overcoming Obstacles

Lack of Response from Facility? (cont.)

You can:

- Encourage council to seek time frame/specific commitments
- Bring up family council recommendations with administrator
- Educate family council about documentation of concerns and filing complaints with the state



Family Council Legislation

- **California, Massachusetts, New York, & Maryland require:**
 - Response in writing by facility in specified time period
 - Sharing of family council info with new residents/family members, and in monthly or quarterly mailings
 - Provision of bulletin board space
 - Correspondence between the council and administration is public
 - Prohibits interference
- **Minnesota requires:**
 - Involvement of family council (if one exists) in the survey process
- **TX Family Council Law (passed 5/07) requires:**
 - Homes to work more closely with family councils
 - i.e.: Provide a representative of the family council with a copy of the final state surveyor's report identifying the cited violations.
 - Facilities to consider the views and recommendations of the family council and make reasonable efforts to resolve the council's grievances



NORC: National Long-Term Care Ombudsman Resource Center

- Provides support, technical assistance and training to the 53 State Long Term Care Ombudsman Programs and their statewide networks of 572 regional (local) programs.
- Objectives: To enhance the skills, knowledge and management capacity of the State programs to enable them to handle residents' complaints and represent resident interests (individual and systemic advocacy).
- Funded by the Administration on Aging (AoA), the Center is operated by NCCNHR: The National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care.

www.ltcombudsman.org

More Information



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Websites:

- NCCNHR: www.nccnhr.org

Click on “Consumer Center” to access the Family Council Center

- National Ombudsman Resource Center (NORC): www.ltcombudsman.org