



## **The Many Faces of Advocacy – What and Advocate Can do for You**

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Later in life there are various circumstances where challenges arise and and we are unable to resolve the situation or get the answers we need ourselves. We may need someone help us, someone who can speak up on our behalf who respects our values supports our quality of life during a time when we may be more vulnerable.

Planning who your advocates will be may even require self-discovery and mindfulness on your part. It is important to understand that if you want a family member or friend to be your only advocate consider their overall knowledge base about a broad spectrum of issues. Ask yourself do they have similar beliefs as you do they value who you are as an individual. Can they remain objective, unbiased, and fair? Do they have the drive to follow through when speaking up on your behalf?

With respect, the term *advocate* should not be taken lightly. Its origins come from the Roman Law Courts and in 1689, the Faculty of Advocates library opened in Edinburgh. According to the Oxford Dictionary, *advocate* means professional pleader in a Court of Justice, a counsel; one who pleads for another; one who speaks for a cause.

According to the Encarta Dictionary, advocate has broader meanings today, such as to recommend or support something; someone who supports or speaks in favour of something; a tireless advocate of social reform; a helper; someone who acts or intercedes on behalf of another; a legal representative; someone who pleads another case in a legal forum.

It's fitting that the word advocate is derived from the Latin *advocare*, to “add a voice.” Advocates may come from the not-for-profit private or corporate sectors. There are also informal, volunteer advocates such as family, friends, and neighbours.

Depending on the issue, a level of expertise is often required for a person to be an effective advocate, because it may be necessary to do research, compile material, strategize and present it in an effective manner to achieve the desired outcome.

Most important is planning your legal advocates for various roles in life and after death such as Health Care Representatives, Power of Attorney and Enduring Power of Attorney, Trustees and Executors. Choose the people for these roles carefully because they will have an impact on your quality of life in later years and on your family members who remain after your death. Your legal representatives should speak as your voice.

The time and amount of work involved and differences in personal beliefs come to the forefront when otherwise amicable family members are put to the task. Making difficult decisions such as should your home be renovated to age in place as opposed to moving you to a care home and choosing to spend your money on the best care possible for you, and hiring other private in home services, if that's what you wanted.

Here are just a few examples of where you might need the help of an outside advocate or family advocate beyond the above difficult questions

### **Legal Matters**

- Support you and your legal rights regarding your property as an owner or a tenant.
- Ensure you get the benefits to which you are entitled from government agencies, insurance agencies, and other professional institutions.
- Ensure properties be managed in an orderly manner.
- Resolve family disputes through legal channels if unable to resolve amicably.
- Defend your legal rights through medical or personal care maltreatment.

### **Health Care Matters**

- Solve problems regarding your quality of life in hospital and residential care and within home care.
- Communicate with hospital teams when questions arise about your medications, care plans, or hospital discharge.
- Know who to speak to when raising questions or going further with complaints.
- Prioritize your list of concerns when going to the doctor.
- Get clarity from your doctor on tests and medical procedures.
- Make medical decisions based on your beliefs values and wishes.

### **Financial Matters**

- Ensure you are getting all the government supports and tax credits to which you are entitled.
- Ensure your daily financial needs are properly managed.

- Watch for any misuse of funds or discrepancies on bank statements and investment accounts.
- Ensure your assets are managed properly.

### **Housing Matters**

- Determine options so you can make well-informed choices about whether to remain in your home or move.
- Ensure you are not being manipulated by others who say they want to live with you or that you should sell your home.
- Provide supports through a move.

### **Daily Life Matters**

- Help you manage your daily life and provide support for the complex array of issues above.
- Provide support for your spiritual, social and physical and daily care needs.

### **Family Matters - If you have chosen family members to be your voice/ advocates, their responsibilities would include;**

- Know all the resources to research your options to help you make informed decisions that match your values if you haven't already specified what's important to you.
- Recognize the consequences, good and bad of having family members move in with you to help care for you particularly when you need full time care.
- Ensure it is the right decision and not putting undue pressure on the family caregiver or on the parent.
- Support you the parent in your choices as expressed in your Later Lifestyle Planning Guide and Personal Resource Book. Understand the reasons, pros and cons of your choices based on your personal values.
- Your family advocates should communicate with other family members in a thoughtful and respectful manner to resolve problems.

### **Ways a Professional Seniors' Advocate Can Assist and Support You**

- Work on your behalf as your legal representative, hired by you.
- Work on your behalf as requested by your Power of Attorney and Health Care Representative.

- Provide guidance and support and solve problems with care, understanding, and discretion.
- Communicate with family in an open and respectful manner.
- Protect the client's information as specified by the client. Communicate only with the family members as requested by the client
- Advocate while navigating the various systems to avoid potential problems. The systems may include hospital, long-term/residential care, housing, home care, daily life management, and household management.
- Understand and respect your personal values and needs.
- Decipher the roles, responsibilities and protocols of various professions as they relate to you as an individual.
- Open the lines of communication between you and relevant professionals and family.
- Help protect your rights as an individual.
- Respond to your questions or needs in a timely manner.
- Provide you with clarity about all actions taken.
- Be accountable for his or her actions on your behalf.

Yes, there are advocates all around us, but beware of the person who appears out of nowhere and offers to help you. Check credentials or ask a person you know and trust before you accept support. Never give account numbers or personal details over the phone. Take a few deep breaths and recognize the value of asking for help.

....with care, integrity and heart in mind for you.

Barb