

Decisionmaking in the Hospital Setting

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The value of patient participation in decisionmaking in situations other than between doctor and patient has also been the subject of review in scholarly journals. The process by which healthcare decisions are made in the hospital and other institutional settings has not, however, been subject to a lot of public attention. Nevertheless, moves to involve patients and their families with in-patient healthcare decisions have been initiated from both without and within institutions.

One such movement began in 1978 when Angelica Thieriot, a lay-person frustrated by a recent hospitalization, founded Planetree -- a not-for-profit consumer healthcare organization. Driven by a vision of a hospital environment where tending to patients' needs for nurturing and information are as vital as tending to their physical needs, Planetree developed a model hospital unit which was subsequently established in a large San Francisco Medical center.

Today, over 25 hospitals in 17 states (including four hospitals in New York State) have Planetree units characterized by an emphasis on patient education and participation in decisionmaking; the physical design of the unit in ways that break down barriers between patients and professionals; and attention to nutrition, touch, and the healing arts. More detailed information may be found on the web at www.planetree.org; by writing to Planetree at 130 Division St. Derby, CT 06418; or by calling 203-731-1365.

At the same time, a number of hospitals have established their own approach to involving patients and their families in decisionmaking. One such hospital, the University of Kentucky Hospital, has implemented a hospital-wide approach to providing patient- and family-centered care. Here, patients and nurses collaborate on plans-of-care when, for each and every shift, nurses review the multi-disciplinary plans-of-care with patients and their families and invite their input. Although seemingly cumbersome, both patients and nurses have responded positively to this initiative.¹

¹ Patricia H. Powers et al., "The Value of Patient- and Family- Centered Care: One hospital's innovative strategy for involving patients and families in care decisions." *AJN* 100(5): 84-88 (2000).

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