

Hospital Patient Representatives

By Judith A. Greenfield, PhD, RN

© 2004 Healthcare Communication Project, Inc. All Rights Reserved

The Patient Representative program began in the late 1950s when a few large medical centers saw a need to help patients navigate through their complex healthcare environments. After a number of years, an ever-increasing number of Patient Representatives formed a national organization and affiliated with the American Hospital Association. Today, Patient Representatives may be found in hospitals throughout the United States, though not all hospitals dedicate a position to patient representation. In such cases, they might assign that function to some or all of their staff. Generally speaking, the role of the Patient Representative is to assist patients in exercising their rights and to advocate for patients. More specifically, they might help patients by providing:

- A more humanized hospital experience by emphasizing ‘care’ as well as ‘cure’;
- An easily identifiable, impartial person to whom the patient can complain, in confidence;
- A mechanism to cut through red tape;
- Encouragements to patients to become active participants in their own health care;
- Support to patients for giving voice to their concerns and questions;
- Assurances that these concerns will be investigated and answered;
- Formal programs to safeguard patients’ rights and to increase staff awareness of those rights;
- Information about, and a link to, available services of which patients might not otherwise be aware;
- Assistance to patients and families in coping with any aspect of hospitalization – medical or non-medical;
- Expanded channels of communication between patients, their families and staff.

If the hospital in which you are staying has a Patient Representative, you can ask to meet with that individual before any problems arise – to connect with them; to give a ‘heads up’ regarding any concerns you might have; or to ask for their assistance. At the very least, you might seek that individual’s name and number.□

Judith A. Greenfield is contributing editor of the *Healthcare Communication Review* and President of the Healthcare Communication Project, Inc.

[Click here](#) for your free subscription to the *Healthcare Communication Review*.