

Basics of Self Advocacy After Upper Limb Loss

Self-advocacy means taking ownership of your healthcare and developing strong relationships with your healthcare team, enabling you to speak up for yourself at every point in your care pathway. It is powerful to help direct the course of your care and achieve the best possible health outcomes. Finding support and ways to advocate for yourself with healthcare providers and insurance companies is essential to your continued recovery because only you know the experience of living in your body.

Build strong, comfortable relationships with your providers. Trust and honesty are important. At times, you will need to talk about emotional experiences and sensitive topics such as hygiene and the circumstances of your amputation. Build rapport with your providers so that you feel comfortable sharing honestly about what's going on with you. Your care team can help you best if they know what you want and need.

Be clear and assertive. Communicate clearly with your care team to help them provide you with better care. If you're unsure about a course of care, it's important to let your provider know that, rather than simply agreeing to the plan they lay out. Speak up for yourself and your needs, talk about your feelings, ask for what you want, request explanations, and ensure you have a mutual understanding.

Keep detailed records. Communicating with doctors, health insurance providers, hospitals, employers, and community resources can be complicated. It's a good idea to save emails and copies of health records, send certified mail, and file documents in an organized system. Record the names of the people you talk to and take written notes. Develop a routine that works best for you and is easy to access.

Engage your support system. Enlist one or more loved ones you trust and can discuss sensitive topics with and depend on for support. Keep them in the loop so they can understand your needs and advocate for you. For example, if a friend or family member accompanies you to appointments, they can help take notes and remind you of questions you want to ask.

Seek out community resources. It may take some research to find the right services and programs available in your community. Search online for your state's vocational rehabilitation (VR) agency website. These agencies exist specifically to help people with disabilities return to work, enter a new line of work, or enter the workforce for the first time.

Visit these sites or scan the codes to find a list of suggested community resources.



hclinic.info/HelpfulOrgs



FindHelp.org



For more information, scan the code or visit HangerClinic.com/ULResources.

* Hanger Clinic: Upper Limb Prosthetic Specialty Network

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