

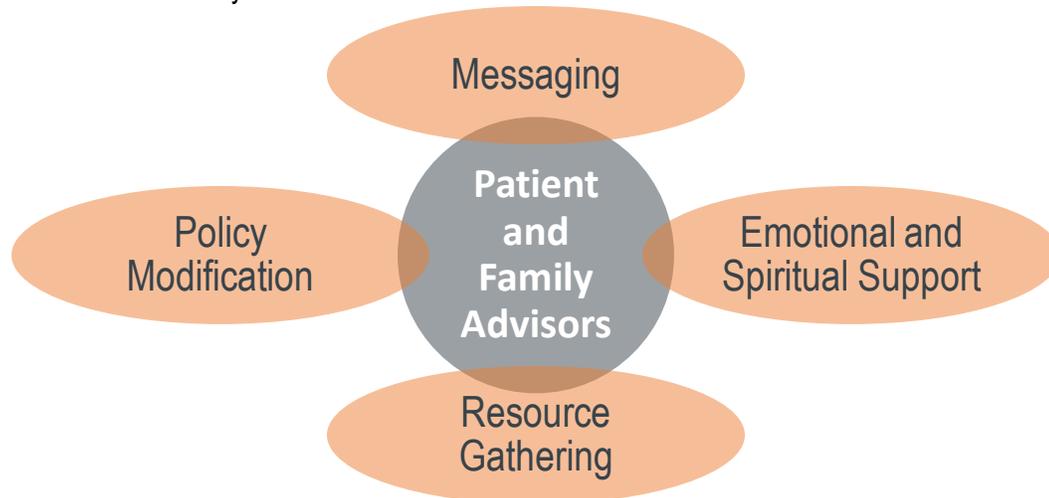
**Patient and Family Advisor engagement is a known, proven strategy to improving the quality and safety of care.** This has never been more important than it is today, right now, in every hospital, clinic, city, suburb or rural community. Your hospital may already partner with PFAs in quality and safety, which are just as important during these times. What to do?

1. Bring at least 1 experienced PFA onto your Emergency Management Committee and into your Incident Command Center. Do it now.
2. Connect the health system communications team to your Patient and Family Advisory Committee if you have one. If not, reach out to a national group like the [PFA network](#), a national network of Patient and Family Advisors at [PFCCpartners](#).

Here is why. When we worked for a major, urban level one trauma center, our Emergency Management Committee planned a mock disaster exercise to test our Emergency Operations Plan and training that had been done for staff. We thought it would be a great opportunity for our Youth Advisors to get out of school, get made up with fake burns and injuries, and portray our disaster victims. We also wanted to get the feedback from our Youth Advisors as they were already very knowledgeable on the way our hospital operated normally and could compare that to what happened during the exercise. The Youth Advisors were enthusiastic participants to be sure, but what we had underestimated was the invaluable insights they shared with us in the de-briefing. It changed the way our Emergency Response team functioned, and even changed our Emergency Operations Plan for the hospital. We bought different, new equipment, including microphones and speakers to be worn inside hazmat suits because the Youth Advisors couldn't hear instructions from the caregiver, and we modified some processes based on the feedback given. We learned the most valuable lesson of all; patient advisor engagement in emergency response will help save lives. We immediately modified our exercise procedures to always include patient advisors.

Today, none of the emergencies are "mock". Every hospital in America, and perhaps the world, has activated their Incident Command Center for emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, are there authentic patient voices helping shape the response and better address the needs of communities and people during the response? Maybe in some places but leaving this important perspective out of this critical planning and implementation leaves a very valuable resource off the table.

What would a Patient & Family Advisor contribute to an Incident Command Center? Lots.



## Messaging

“It’s not so much what you say, it’s how you say it” Patient and Family Advisors are great at helping craft key messages in plain language. They are typically not burdened by medical terminology. They can help translate critical information in ways that are more easily understood by the community they represent

Patients and family advisors are typically connected to a network of other patients, families and communities. The power of word of mouth is undeniable.

## Policy Modification

Family presence presents its own set of risks right now. Social media is full of heart wrenching stories about people dying alone, or family members dropping a sick loved one off at a hospital, believing they may never see their mother, father, son, daughter, etc. again. Patients and Family Advisors can help think through when to say yes, when to say no, and how to say no and then help communicate those messages in a caring and supportive, yet realistic manner.

## Emotional and Spiritual Support

I learned a long time ago that the kindest, most effective way I could support other families in crisis like mine, was to assure them that they or their loved ones were getting good care, and that the doctors and nurses who were caring for them were really excellent. It was “insider information”, and it was the truth. This kind of intangible support for family members who cannot be present helps to ease anxiety in very uncertain times.

## Resource Gathering

From Christian Siriano to the lady down the street, Americans are sewing masks. Patient and Family Advisors probably have the time to find out who is, or who can do this in local communities. Advisors are a connection to community-based resources and activities that are valuable to consider in your COVID response.”

One day, hopefully soon, this crisis will be behind us. We will de-brief like crazy, put a spotlight on things that went well, discuss those things that didn’t go well, and examine lessons learned. We will change our Emergency Operations Plan; change the way we plan for pandemics and for large influxes of patients overall. We hope that one conclusion will be that we did it in large part, because we all did it together.

Wishing you good health and safety in the meantime.

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