

Personal health planner helps Amedisys' patients reach goals

Amedisys Home Health Services in April introduced its nurses to a personal health planner for patients called “A Bridge to Healthy Living.”

Nurse Case Manager Tina Bartlett of Thomasville, N.C., was skeptical, but she didn't waste any time in showing the planner to her next patient. That patient, a man in his late 40s with high blood pressure, was none too compliant.

“He was not taking his meds, and when I asked him why, he said, ‘I'm sick and tired of these pills controlling my life.’ And I said, ‘But these pills are letting you have your life. You have to flip your thinking around,’” she told him.

Bartlett went over the 19-page health planner with her patient and explained how he was supposed to write down his health goals and to work on filling out the pages little by little. About a week later, she visited him again. He hadn't worked on his health planner, but he had started taking his medication, and he realized he was feeling better as a result.

During her next visit, she discovered he had completed his entire personal planner. He had listed his doctors and their phone numbers. He had listed his medications and their dosage schedule. He had written down the people who should be called in case of an emergency. Most importantly, he had written down his health goals.

“We don't write in this book. That's the challenge,” said Bartlett. “We walk them through it, and if they're disabled or can't read and write, we enlist a caregiver to help them fill it out, but we don't write in this book.”

As it happens, his girlfriend of more than 20 years had been hospitalized with a stroke. His goal was to stay well so he could take care of her when she came home. Soon after, Bartlett received a call from her boss, who had in turn received a call from a doctor at a local hospital.

“The doctor wanted to know what was going on. The patient's blood pressure was normal. The doctor said he had tried for years to get him to take his blood pressure medication, and he couldn't believe it was normal. He said to keep up the good work.”

Since that first success, Bartlett has experienced others. For example, there was the woman whose doctor decreased her medication, but she didn't realize it. When the doctor saw the book, he realized she was still following the old medication schedule and was able to point out the new dosage. Along those same lines, there are a surprising number of patients taking the same medication twice or even thrice, as prescribed by different doctors.

“The book is really a go-between between us, the doctor and the patient,” said Bartlett.

The book also encourages better care coordination, she said. The agency's name is on the front of the book, so if a doctor needs blood drawn for lab work, he can call Bartlett and ask her to do it in the home. She, in turn, can relay the information to the ordering doctor.