

NS Moms to the RESCUE...



With
TOOLS & TIPS
for trusted caregivers
of those who live with
serious mental illness

NOVA
SCOTIA
Moms

Guidelines for Communication with Physicians

Caregiver mothers (Moms), you bring the most extraordinary dedication, insight, and compassion to the lives of your adult children living with severe mental illness. The care that Moms provide — often quiet, persistent, and deeply personal — is a powerful part of the recovery journey.

Most physicians understand that families see the day-to-day realities that cannot always be fully expressed during appointments, and many deeply value the perspective, commitment, and love that caregivers bring to the process of care.

Partner with Clinicians. When you share your timely observations, concerns, and updates with physicians you help build a fuller picture that supports safer, more responsive treatment. Your voice really matters. Your experience really matters.

Mental health uses a team approach and it may be easier to communicate with the nurse or social worker involved in your loved ones care rather than the physician. It may also be the non-physician clinician who sees your loved one the most. Include all their primary clinicians in your communication, e.g cc your email or registered mail to the involved nurse even if your question is primarily to the physician.

Remember. NS Moms are with you every step of your way on your recovery journey with your loved one.

Why your input is important

Caregiver mothers often hold essential knowledge about their adult child's history, daily realities, and early warning signs of change. When physicians listen to and thoughtfully consider caregiver input — while respecting patient autonomy, consent, and privacy — care becomes more informed, responsive, and safer.

Respectful partnership between physicians and caregivers strengthens continuity of care, supports better clinical understanding, and contributes to more hopeful outcomes. When caregiver voices are welcomed alongside clinical expertise and patient experience, the shared goals of recovery, safety, and dignity become more achievable for everyone involved.

Physicians are required to receive information presented by caregivers either in writing or verbally. Even when clinicians cannot share details in return, caregiver observations are essential to help identify emerging risks, treatment responses, functional changes, and patterns that may not be visible during brief clinical encounters. Families see what happens between appointments — changes in behaviour, medication effects, stressors, and early signs of relapse — making their perspective an essential part of the clinical picture.

When physicians acknowledge caregiver contributions and families feel heard, trust grows and collaboration becomes stronger.

If communication breaks down

Privacy laws do not allow clinicians to *share* personal health information if someone refuses this, but clinicians can always *receive* information from caregivers. If you feel like you are being excluded from care, call the clinic and request a meeting or phone call with the treating clinician to share concerns you have about your loved one.

Physicians are also required to provide you with essential information needed for safety. Caregivers have a legitimate interest in ensuring that relevant clinical information is considered, particularly when safety or stability may be at risk. If you need such information it is appropriate to take respectful but immediate action.

First, document your concerns in writing. Keep your communication clear, factual, and focused on observable behaviours, safety risks, medication concerns, or functional changes.

Email is appropriate, but also send a copy by registered or express mail so there is confirmation of delivery. Request written acknowledgement of receipt. And state clearly that the information is provided for inclusion in the medical record.

If you are unsatisfied you should immediately consider the following steps:

- Write a formal letter to the clinic practice manager or hospital manager with full details.
- Submit a written concern to the relevant regulatory authority if patient safety appears compromised.

See also: [NSMoms.ca/complaints](https://www.nsmoms.ca/complaints)

Emergency Room Visits

Always BE PREPARED. Mental Health emergencies can occur at any time.

Bring these with you:

Keep a baseline record, a one page description of your loved one when in good health with a picture.

Keep a one-page summary and a card with the most important ‘jot note’ information, i.e., diagnosis, medications, safety risks, recent escalations, number of hospitalizations (amount of time, dates), current psychiatrist, etc. Keep these in your purse AND in your glove compartment. Bring them with you.

At triage:

- State safety concerns directly: “Please note that I am worried about immediate safety because...”
- Use the most recent specific examples.
- Ask/demand that your written summary be added to the medical record.

If discharge is being considered and you believe it is unsafe:

- Calmly say: “I am concerned discharge may not be safe.”
- Ask and record what criteria were used to decide against admission.
- Request/demand that your concerns be documented.
- Ask whether a psychiatric assessment has been completed.
- Request a copy of the discharge plan and say, “I need time. I am not set up yet to receive my child”

(Timely accessible, mental health services prevent ER visits, but when ER is the only option we should be as prepared as possible.)

See also: [NSMoms.ca/er](https://www.nsmoms.ca/er)

Important

Emergency - call 911.

Mental Health Mobile Crisis - 902-429-8167

This Moms Facebook site helps caregiver moms share ideas and information to transform their caregiving journeys.

[facebook.com/groups/491715690128867/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/491715690128867/)

This Moms website helps caregiver moms who need support communicating with doctors and the Nova Scotia Health System

[NSMoms.ca](https://www.nsmoms.ca)

This excellent site contains much information of use to caregiver moms. The focus is on helping moms care for their aging parents

<https://caregiversns.org/>

Read This Information

For medical advice contact a registered physician.

For legal advice try [Dalhousie Legal Aid Service](https://www.dalhousielaw.ca/legal-aid-service/) or contact a lawyer.

Information in this pamphlet is based completely on the actual experiences of many caregiver Moms. It is not legal advice. It is not medical advice. It is purely the advice of experience with the Nova Scotia Health System. NSMoms can accept no responsibility for how you choose to use (or not to use) this information.

The cover page is designed by Cyndi Corbett.

(Please Note: Although Moms are often the most dedicated caregivers, the info in this pamphlet is for all trusted caregivers.)

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