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PROMOTING CHOICE AND OPTIONS IN THE COMMUNITY FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

Medical History: Using the Past to Support the Present

As a direct support professional, part of your job is to ensure that the people you support are able to manage their health care needs. One of the best ways to do this is by understanding their medical histories. When you understand and make a record of someone's medical history, you can work with the person's health care providers to treat health conditions in the most appropriate ways.

Why is a medical history record important?

Keeping track of and writing down their medical history can be especially important for those with developmental disabilities.

- People with developmental disabilities often see several doctors and take many medications. By keeping their medical history records up-to-date, individuals can help each of their doctors know the different treatments they are receiving, which can help avoid dangerous medication interactions.
- Some people with developmental disabilities may have trouble communicating verbally. A written medical history record can provide health care professionals with quick and easy access to the information needed to provide proper treatment, especially in an emergency.

How can a medical history record help me to provide support?

As a direct support professional, an

individual's medical history can help you to:

- Know which medications an individual takes and assist with self-administration of medications.
- Be aware of a person's allergies.
- Provide proper first aid – for example, you would respond differently to a bee sting depending on whether the person who was stung is allergic to bees.
- Respond to an emergency – by knowing an individual's medical history and keeping the information readily available, you can quickly share needed information with emergency personnel.
- Respond to new signs or symptoms – by understanding someone's past conditions, you can tell if their symptoms are new or recurring concerns.

What can I do?

The information that makes up a complete medical history may come from many different sources (*see box*). By gathering these pieces of information in one folder, you can make sure that the medical history record is easily accessible to you, the person you support, and the person's health care providers. You can:

- Assist the people you support to gather all the information from their medical history into one document or folder.
- Encourage those with serious allergies or health conditions to wear a medical alert bracelet.



What is a Medical History?

A medical history is made up of different pieces of information that tell the complete story of a person's past and current health. A medical history should include:

- ✓ All diagnoses
- ✓ Past and present illness(es)
- ✓ Family history of health care needs and illnesses
- ✓ Current medications
- ✓ Medication history
- ✓ Names of current doctor(s) and dentist
- ✓ List of known allergies
- ✓ Immunization records
- ✓ Emergency contact information
- ✓ Name of Regional Center service coordinator
- ✓ Previous surgeries
- ✓ Previous hospitalizations
- ✓ Insurance information

FACT FOCUS: Medical History and the IPP

As a member of someone's planning team, it is important to consult that person's medical history record as you are assisting with his or her Individual Program Plan (IPP). A current health history record and physician's report should be used to identify and address the individual's health care needs during the planning process. A completed IPP sometimes includes a healthcare plan that describes:

- Goals, objectives, and plans for health care needs.
- Specific responsibilities of the direct support professional and others involved in the person's life.
- A way to evaluate the plan's success in supporting the individual to achieve or maintain the best possible health.





Severe Allergic Reactions: Learn about Anaphylaxis

Many people have allergies that cause uncomfortable symptoms, such as itchy eyes, a runny nose, or a rash. While these types of allergies are irritating, they can often be managed without visiting the doctor. However, anaphylaxis is a severe allergic reaction that requires immediate medical attention. As a direct support professional, it is important for you to know how to respond to this life-threatening condition.

What are the symptoms of anaphylaxis?

Anaphylaxis is characterized by hives, swelling, difficulty breathing or swallowing, rapid heart rate, and dropping blood pressure. In severe cases, a person experiencing anaphylaxis can go into shock, and may die.

The first sign of an anaphylactic reaction may be severe itching of the eyes and face. This can rapidly progress to more serious symptoms, including hives, difficulty breathing, abdominal pain, vomiting, diarrhea, a racing heartbeat, and shock. If not treated, a person having an anaphylactic reaction can die within minutes.

Remember: If you suspect that a person you support is experiencing anaphylaxis, call 911!

What are some common triggers of anaphylactic allergic reactions?

Food is the most common trigger for an anaphylactic allergic reaction. Common food triggers include:

- Peanuts and tree-nuts
- Shellfish, such as shrimp or lobster
- Dairy products
- Eggs, especially egg whites
- Sesame seeds

Other common triggers include:

- Bee or wasp stings
- Medications, such as penicillin
- Latex rubber

What should I do if someone I support experiences anaphylaxis?

Individuals who have any history of anaphylaxis, even if the reaction was not severe, should always carry an epinephrine injection kit that is prescribed by their doctor. If someone you support needs an epinephrine injection kit, read the individual's healthcare plan and talk to their physician. Be aware that there may be specific licensing or other regulatory requirements regarding medications and the provision of specific medical supports depending upon the type of residential service model where you work.

Encourage people with severe allergies to wear a medical alert bracelet. This will help emergency personnel and others know what to do if a person develops anaphylaxis.

Anaphylactic reactions often become more severe with repeated exposure to the trigger. This means that someone who had a mild reaction to something in the past is likely to have a more severe reaction in the future. As a direct support professional, it is vital for you to know what triggers could lead to an allergic reaction, and to help individuals maintain an environment free from these triggers.

FYI: Resource Links for Better Living



For more information on how to document and use an individual's medical history, you can visit the following websites:

AARP: Recording your Health History

http://www.aarp.org/health/staying_healthy/prevention/a2004-03-01-healthhistory.html

Medline Plus: Personal Medical Records

<http://www.myphr.com/resources/tour.asp>

My Family Health Portrait: A website where you can create a family health history

<https://familyhistory.hhs.gov/>

A worksheet you can use to assist the individuals you support as they document their medical histories (This worksheet will be available on the DDS Safety Net <http://www.ddssafety.net> in July 2007.)

Preparing a First Aid Kit

Keeping a first aid kit well-stocked with the items below can help you react quickly and calmly to minor injuries. **Remember:** If you are not sure whether you can provide appropriate first aid for someone's injury, call for help! If the person is unconscious, bleeding heavily, has broken bones, or appears to be in shock, **call 911.**

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|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Self-adhesive bandages (all sizes) ○ Sterile gauze and medical tape ○ Tweezers, scissors, and safety pins ○ Cotton balls and cotton-tipped swabs ○ Instant cold packs ○ Alcohol pads, or alcohol and cotton balls ○ Antiseptic solution (hydrogen peroxide) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Thermometer ○ Disposable latex or synthetic gloves ○ Flashlight with extra batteries ○ Mouthpiece for giving CPR ○ Soap and hand sanitizer ○ Eye wash (saline solution) |
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Check out www.ddssafety.net for more information that can help individuals with developmental disabilities live healthier and happier lives!

The site is translated into Spanish and Tagalog!

...Just log on and tell us what you think...