



HEALTH ADVOCATES

## 7 THINGS TO LOOK FOR IN AN INDEPENDENT PATIENT ADVOCATE:

1. What type of experience, education and expertise does the advocate have? They should have some background in a medical/health field. If the advocate is not a clinical professional (RN or MD) does she have a network of clinical professional she can contact for advice?
2. Does the advocacy practice have a legal business entity (Incorporated, LLC?) and are they appropriately insured? Having a legal business entity indicates the advocate takes his business seriously and has established an infrastructure. The advocate should have E&O insurance. If the advocate is a nurse or doctor, she should also carry professional liability insurance.
3. Is the advocate a member of professional organizations such as the [National Association of Health Advocacy Consultants](#), [Alliance of Professional Health Advocates](#)? Do they subscribe to the Health Advocate's Code of Conduct and Professional Standards? This should be clearly stated on their website.
4. What services do they offer and which can they not provide? Are these the services you specifically need? Some advocates specialize in a specific niche and may not have the expertise to help you in other areas. And as time goes on, your needs might change. If there is a service you need, or might need in the future, that this advocates doesn't offer, do they have a professional network to refer you elsewhere?
5. Is the advocate familiar with community resources? Health and medical issues often tie in with other barriers. You want someone who knows how to direct you to other organizations and providers who can help.
6. Do they offer a free initial consultation to determine a good fit with your needs? They should agree to meet with you and develop a plan or scope of work before you sign a contract for services. The scope of work should be as specific as possible and include their expected fee schedule.
7. How accessible is the advocate? Health issues can happen at night and on weekends so if an advocate does not offer access (after hours cellphone number or email address) they may not be there when you need them the most. Of course, you'll want to be sure it *is* an emergency or something that may result in harm to the patient before calling after hours.



## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Here are a few articles to help you learn more about patient advocates:

[http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/12/health/12patient.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/12/health/12patient.html?_r=1)

<http://patients.about.com/od/caringforotherpatients/a/patadvocacy.htm>

<http://patients.about.com/od/caringforotherpatients/a/How-Much-Does-It-Cost-To-Hire-A-Private-Patient-Or-Health-Advocate.htm>

## LOCATING AN INDEPENDENT ADVOCATE

There is a growing network of independent advocates across the country. Whether you need help close to home or are concerned about a loved one far away, you can go to [www.advoconnection.com](http://www.advoconnection.com) and find a reputable advocate. All advocates on this database are legitimate businesses. Specialty advocates can also be located through this website.

## CAVEAT EMPTOR!

Buyer beware. At the time this document was prepared there was **NO actual credential** for patient advocacy. There are several programs that grant a **certificate** for completing their coursework. But these are NOT a “certification” credential. If an advocate tells you she is a certified patient advocate, she is misrepresenting her services. Several professional organizations are currently working on the establishing a credentialing process so this situation should be rectified soon.