

On Christmas Eve, while I was out of town, my son ended up in the emergency room of Boulder Community Hospital. He has schizophrenia and substance abuse disorder. Somebody found him at a bus stop beaten and unconscious.

He called me from the ER. He was furious with me for being out of the country. He thought he had been 'jumped' at a bar, but he wasn't really sure what happened. Eventually he hung up on me.

I called the hospital to find out about my son's condition. Naturally I wanted to inform them about his mental illness. They asked his permission to speak to me about his condition. In his agitated state he refused it. I was given no information. I was able to tell them the name of his psychiatrist and that I hoped they would do a psychiatric evaluation before they let him go.

I never found out the extent of his injuries, the circumstances that led to them or what recommendations the hospital made for his recuperation. I don't know if the police were involved. I don't know if anybody else was hurt. I do know the incident was not trivial, but only because his face was cut and bruised when I got home a few days later.

If he had an advanced directive, the hospital could have called me. We would have been able to discuss his condition and the options for his care. I would have known if any follow-up was necessary.

Being a caregiver is made immensely more difficult when you are prevented from getting information about your dependent's condition. My son's health is conditional on my assistance. Nevertheless, when he is in an agitated or psychotic state, I am often the target of his paranoia and anger.

Caring for someone with a serious mental illness is complicated and requires coordination between caregivers and health care professionals. The Psychiatric Advanced Directive will be a huge help to patients and caregivers. It will improve the communication between patients, caregivers and providers and result in better outcomes for all.

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