Family Issues

1. *Routinely ask about family issues to understand their impact on the patient’s illness and the impact of the illness on the family.*
2. *Explore family issues:*
* *periodically*
* *at important life-cycle points (eg. When children move out, after the birth of a baby, etc)*
* *when faced with problems not resolving in spite of appropriate therapeutic interventions (eg. Mediation compliance, fibromyalgia, hypertension)*

Family can mean more than the traditional nuclear family to some patients. It is important to enquire who your patient’s primary supports are and who they consider family. These are the people who will have the greatest impact to them. Some people may not identify with having any close family/friends, and it may be important to then enquire about work colleagues, spiritual/faith groups, other regular activities they might attend and the people involved. Never forget to inquire about pets … some people are as close to their pets as they would be family!!

Gain an understanding of the importance of different roles each family member has. For example, in some families/cultural groups, the men are valued more than the women or there is one decision maker who has the final say for the entire family. It is important to uncover these hierarchical frameworks to most effectively take care of your families.

We usually only see people individually, but don’t forget to ask about the web of people that shape their lives!