

**DHSSPS
CONSULTATION DOCUMENT**

**Guiding Principles for the
production of Hospital Visiting
Policies**

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Closing date for consultation - 1st April 2008

Hospital Visiting Policy

1. Introduction

This document describes the principles and guidance relating to visiting in hospital wards and departments.

All Trusts are required to ensure that the principles outlined in this document are reflected in their Local Visiting Policies.

All healthcare professionals must treat visitors with respect and politeness.

A zero tolerance policy will be operated in respect of violence. Visitors displaying threatening or abusive behavior will be asked to leave.

2. Purpose

Visiting patients in hospital is an integral part of health and social care activity. All patients are entitled to, and should be enabled, to maintain contact with friends and relatives for the duration of their in-patient stay.

Visiting times should support patients and aid their recovery as well as enabling staff to deliver care in a timely safe and effective manner.

A Visiting Policy will promote the health, safety, and privacy of patients.

HSC Trusts should have clear visiting policies which are well advertised, minimise confusion for patients and visitors, and

enable patients to receive their treatment and allow adequate cleaning of ward areas.

2. Aim of this document guidance

The aim of this document is to provide Guiding Principles for the production of Trust visiting policies, which promote health, safety and infection control whilst maintaining the patient's privacy and dignity.

3. Scope

Whilst the guiding principles in relation to the content of the Visiting Policy will apply to all HSC facilities, some clinical areas may require adaptation in the application to suit the individual circumstances.

The following areas may have special arrangements:-

- Critical care units
- Neonatal units
- Paediatric units
- Mental Health facilities
- Learning Disability facilities

In the case of these areas local policy should be specific to the individual needs of the unit, reflect best practice, promote the concept of patient centred care and incorporate all relevant infection prevention and control principles.

There may be exceptional circumstances where visiting outside the normal hours may be agreed with staff. These should be agreed on the basis of individual patient's needs and there will be requirement to review the arrangements should the circumstances change.

4. Objectives

- To facilitate appropriate visitation while at the same time ensuring the safety and wellbeing of patients including the provision of a quiet, restful environment conducive to healing.
- To allow patients enough time to recuperate, have their meals free from interruption and to allow staff to provide care and treatment while ensuring patient privacy.
- To promote good Infection Prevention and Control measures and the reduction of hospital associated infections.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

All Trusts are required to ensure that they have a Visiting Policy which incorporates these guiding Principles.

Trusts should provide information on visiting times and clear direction to staff and visitors. Visiting times will be displayed on the entrance doors to all wards and will be included in the hospital Information Booklet and Trust website. Patients will be advised of visiting times on admission.

6. PRINCIPLES

A visiting Policy should incorporate the following guiding principles.

1. The start of each visiting period should ideally be supervised by a member of the ward staff who will remind visitors to use the hand sanitizers provided.
2. Visiting times should be scheduled in a way which facilitates maximum access for the cleaning team.
3. Visiting periods should be limited to 2 hours.
4. Close family/carers may visit out of hours if a patient is seriously ill. This will be agreed with the nurse in charge.
5. The nurse in charge will discuss additional individual and special circumstances for visiting with patients and their visitors and will try to accommodate these circumstances as flexibly as possible.
6. Visiting at mealtimes will be restricted (exceptions for ill patients and those where visitors who assist with feeding)
7. There should be a maximum of 2 visitors per patient at any one time. If the numbers exceed this, the nursing staff will ask some visitors to leave and wait in an appropriate area.
8. The duration of individual visits or numbers of visitors may be limited further by staff if it is felt to be in the best interest of the patient.
9. Children under the age of 16 must be accompanied by an adult. Children under the age of 5 will only be allowed to visit in exceptional circumstances and with the agreement of the Ward Sister

10. Visitors will be provided with the use of chairs and are asked not to sit on beds.
11. Visitors may be asked to leave at anytime if a patient's condition is judged to be deteriorating, if the patient becomes fatigued or if a clinical intervention is necessary.
12. Staff must ensure that visitors comply with infection control policies and guidelines.
13. Restrictions may be put in place for infection prevention and control purposes and on the recommendation of the clinical or Infection Prevention and Control team.
14. Patients and visitors should only bring in food items following discussion with the nurse in charge
15. Mobile phones, Cameras and camcorders must not be used within the clinical area.

Infection Prevention and Control, Issues

Visitors should be asked not to visit if they have any infectious conditions such as

- Vomiting and/or diarrhea,
- Coughs colds or Flu Type symptoms
- Any other infectious condition such as chicken pox

All visitors must wash their hands or use the hand Sanitizer on entering and leaving the ward

As Clear surfaces promote good access for cleaning staff visitors should be asked not to bring excessive or unnecessary items.

REFERENCES

References, including relevant external guidelines:

- 'Changing the Culture Action Plan for Prevention and Control of Healthcare Associated Infections in N.I.' DHSSPSNI
- 'Cleanliness Matters' a regional strategy for improving the standards of environmental cleanliness within NHS of S Trust 2005/2008.
- 'Strategy for Prevention and Control Healthcare Associated Infections in N.I. 2005-2010 (June 2005)

General Infection Control Information for Visitors

If you are visiting anyone in the Trust, there are a number of things you can do to help prevent the spread of infection. Remember hospitals have many vulnerable patients.

How you can help to prevent the spread of infection

- **Strictly adhere to visiting times and to the number of visitors allowed.**
- **Wash your hands or use hand rubs provided before entering and upon leaving the ward or place of care.**
- **Do not visit if you are feeling unwell or have any infection such as flu, heavy cold or diarrhea and vomiting. If you are unsure telephone and check with the person in charge of the ward before you visit.**
- **It is generally not advisable to bring perishable food e.g. sandwiches, takeaways etc. into the hospital**
- **Check what kind of gifts or food it is OK to bring in.**
- **Visitors are asked to help us keep our hospitals clean and if you have concerns regarding any cleanliness issue, ensure you raise this with the person in charge.**
- **Do not sit on patients' beds when visiting.**
- **Separate toilets are provided for visitors; please do not use patients' toilets.**
- **Do not touch any dressings, drips or equipment around the bed.**
- **It is generally not advisable to bring babies or young children to hospital, as they may be at risk of contracting infections.**

If you are worried or unsure about any infection control issue ask a nurse to explain or if you still have concerns please contact the patient support officer or a member of the infection control team.