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Guidance on patients' families and carers presence in Emergency Departments



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Clinical Guidance

Guidance on patients' families and carers presence in Emergency Departments

The aim of the Emergency Medicine Programme (EMP) is improve safety, quality, access and value in the patient care delivered in the emergency care environment. The EMP also seeks to ensure that all patients receive the same standard of care in Emergency Departments (EDs) and Injury Units (IUs) regardless of when and where in the country they present for treatment. This guidance document aims to provide a fair and standardised approach to policy with regard to families, carers and friends visiting patients while they are being treated in EDs and IUs.

Purpose

The purpose of this guidance is to assist staff, patients, their families, carers and visitors to enhance their experiences of ED care through providing clear guidance on visiting. The guidance provided for EDs in this document applies equally to IUs.

Background

Currently across the country, policies on the numbers of visitors and the times they may visit a patient in the ED varies from one hospital to the next. This can cause confusion and inconvenience for patients and the ED staff who care for them. This issue was raised by patient representatives through the HSE Patient Advocacy Unit and the EMP Emergency Nursing Interest Group (ENIG) undertook to define clear and comprehensive guidance on patient visiting in response to the patient representatives' concerns.

Objectives

The objectives of this guidance are to:

- Acknowledge and increase awareness of the potential benefits for both ED/IU patients and staff, of patients' families and friends contributing to patient care in the ED/IU;
- Ensure the safety, privacy and dignity of patients while they are in the ED/IU;
- Recognise the individual needs of each patient;
- Support ED/IU staff in delivering timely, efficient and quality care to ED/IU patients;
- Provide clear and appropriate guidance to patients and their families and friends on visiting in the ED/IU;
- Outline the on-going staff training and development needs required to provide optimal patient, family and visitor experiences of ED/IU care.

The Benefits of Patients' Families, Carers and Friends involvement in ED/IU patient care

This guidance recognises the important contributions that patients' families and friends can make to patient care. Patients, their families and other partners in care are respected as essential members of the healthcare team, helping to ensure quality and safety.¹ The benefit of patients' families and friends' involvement is well described in the context of acute and chronic illness presentations.² The

importance of Family-Centred patient care for Paediatric Emergency Medicine in particular is outlined in the EMP Report 2012³.

Key Considerations for ED/IU Visiting

- The safety, privacy and confidentiality of patients' and the safety of staff are of prime importance.
- All ED/IU staff should encourage families and friends to be involved and supportive of the patient according to the patient's preference.
- ED/IU crowding may require fewer visitors than is ideal to be allowed in the ED/IU for safety reasons.
- In cases where the patient has intellectual or physical disability or where patient is confused or distressed it is advisable to allow a visitor remain with them.

Training and Professional Development

It is essential that all staff are familiar with application of visiting policy and that on-going refresher training is available for the multidisciplinary team. Patient and family feedback on visiting should be sought as part of the ED/IU's approach to quality improvement. The policy should be reviewed and amended as required. A record of any training undertaken should be kept at local level.

Template Information Sheet for Patients, Families and Carers

An example of the information that may be provided in the ED/IU is outlined in Appendix 1. This information may be provided in written format and communicated through other media e.g. waiting room video displays. The need for translation of this information should be considered, as should how this information can be shared with patients who have literacy or communication difficulties.

Appendix 1: Patient Family and Friend Visiting Guidance

Introduction

The Emergency Department (ED) / Injury Unit (IU) team appreciate and recognises your need to be with your family member or friend when they present to the ED/IU. The number of patients we treat and the design of the building can make it difficult to accommodate all of a patient's family and friends who may wish to visit a patient while they are here. Our team works to provide safe, timely and efficient care while maintaining our patients' dignity and privacy. We need your assistance to help us in this and to ensure the best level of care for all patients while you are here.

In order to implement the above objectives we ask that you assist the ED/IU staff by following the guidance given below.

When a patient arrives in the ED/IU

- You can expect ED/IU staff to understand and respond to your wish to visit your family member or friend while they are in the ED/IU.
- A patient has a right to allow or refuse to have visitors in the ED/IU.
- Allow the ED/IU staff approximately 20 minutes on the patient's arrival to undertake an assessment and make them comfortable. However, if you feel you can improve the patients care by being present e.g. where the patient is confused, vulnerable or distressed, please discuss this with the Nurse-in-Charge and we will accommodate you.

When Young People are Patients

If the patient is a young person or child (under 18 years), both parents or guardians will be invited to remain in the ED/IU.

How You Can Help

- Family and friends are asked to comply with all hospital policies regarding hand hygiene.
- The ED/IU staff recognise, that each patient has individual needs and encourages you to speak with them regarding your family member or friend's specific needs.
- The ED/IU staff recognise, that you, as a family member or friend, know the patient better than they do. We welcome and appreciate your input in the delivery of their care. It is vital that you discuss any specific care needs that your family member or friend has. ED staff will at all times aim to meet these needs and encourage your involvement.
- Do not supply patients with food and drinks without checking with the nurse or doctor caring for the patient. The patient may need to fast for an investigation or procedure.

You may be asked to leave the ED/IU sometimes

- Occasionally, circumstances may arise when it is inappropriate for any family or friends to be present with a patient during their treatment.
- If an emergency occurs while you are with your family member or friend, you may be asked to go to the waiting room for a period of time. You will be kept informed of the situation by a member of staff and will be able to return as soon as is appropriate.

- If more than one family member or friend has accompanied a patient to the ED/IU, we will ask that just one person remains at the bedside. This is due to space constraints within the ED/IU and to allow privacy for all patients.
- If a patient does not wish to have family or friends present.
- To protect a patient's privacy and confidentiality
- The presence of family or friends may be restricted for certain periods during the day to allow for personal care or meal times.
- When doctors are examining a patient.
- Please be aware that there may be times when the guidelines need to be adjusted to protect both the patient and their family and friends e.g. **Outbreaks of transmissible diseases**, or when there is crowding in the ED/IU.

General Guidance

- Family and friends are asked to comply with all hospital policies regarding hand hygiene and measures to prevent the spread of suspected infection.
- The use of mobile phones may be restricted in the ED/IU – please ask staff.
- Do not leave valuables unattended in the ED/IU.
- Violence or aggression towards staff or patients will not be tolerated.
- Please be aware that the ED/IU is a treatment area and refrain from behaviour that would disturb patients or distract staff. Family and friends are requested to and comply with any requests made by Emergency Department staff.
- Patients, families, nurses and other members of the healthcare team can ask to re-evaluate or modify the presence and participation of visitors. All such decisions will be documented in the patient notes.

Duration of visiting

The recommended visiting time is 20 minutes. This ensures the delivery of care to the patient is not disrupted. The ED staff recognise, that certain patients may need a family member or friend to be present at all times to assist with their care and communication needs. In these cases the Nurse-in-Charge will aim to ensure your presence at all times

When not to visit

Family and friends are requested not to visit if they have recent **transmissible disease or a close contact of someone who has within the past five days**. This is to protect the patients in the ED/IU from infection. We strongly discourage bringing children who are not patients to the ED/IU.

Communication

- Please check with a member of staff before you leave that the correct contact details have been recorded if you are the patient's next of kin or the person to be contacted should an emergency arise.
- Please check that you have the correct contact number for the ED/IU or hospital in case you need further information. Please note that ED/IU staff are unable to give confidential information over the telephone.

- Families are encouraged to designate a family spokesperson to facilitate effective communication among extended family members and hospital staff.

Appendix 2: References and Resources

1. Bordreaux, E.D., Francis,J.L, & Loyacono,T. (2002) Family presence during invasive procedures and resuscitations in the Emergency Department: A critical review and suggestions for future research. *Annals of Emergency Medicine*, 40(2), 193-205.
2. Brumbaugh, B., & Sodomka, P. (2009, August). Patient and family centred care- The impact on patient safety and satisfaction: A comparison study of intensive care units at an academic medical centre.
3. Titler, M.G (1997) Family visitation and partnership in the critical care unit. In M.Chulay & N.C. Molter (Eds), *creating a healing environment series*.
4. O'Donovan,E (2013). *Policy on the Management and Control of Visitors to the Emergency Department*, Mid Western Regional Hospital, Limerick.
5. St. James Hospital, Visiting Policy

Appendix 3: Document Information and Acknowledgements

The Emergency Medicine Programme acknowledges the assistance of staff in the Emergency Departments in the development of this guidance.

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Summary This document describes a standard national policy for Patient Visitors in ED

Reviewed by Emergency Medicine Programme Working Group, Irish Association for Emergency Medicine, Emergency Nursing Interest Group, HSE Patient Advocacy Unit, Quality and Patient Safety Directorate

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Applies to All Emergency Departments and Injury Units

Audience Acute hospital CEOs/General Managers/Operational Managers, Clinical Directors, Directors of Nursing, Consultants in Emergency Medicine and Emergency Department nursing, medical and administrative staff, patient advocacy groups; ED and IU patients, their families and carers

Approved by National Emergency Medicine Programme

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Associated documents National Emergency Medicine Report 2012