



Ministry Guidelines

Guidelines When Conducting Hospital or Nursing Home Visits

People in a hospital or nursing home may be in unfamiliar surroundings. They may be experiencing considerable pain, uncertainty, or fear over their condition. They may be affected by anesthesia or another medication. People in these situations become more vulnerable because they may not be completely themselves.

Additional care must be taken when ministering to them, as outlined below:

1. Upon arrival at the hospital or nursing home, check with a nurse or attendant to determine if the person is able to receive visitors and to make them aware of your presence.
2. Make yourself aware of institutional rules, and procedures and follow them closely. For example, some hospitals may require the use of security badges for regular visitors. Some areas of the hospital may have strict hand washing or other policies in place.
3. If you are a regular hospital visitor and your hospital has an on-site chaplain, make yourself known to this person. Use this person as a resource when appropriate. The hospital chaplain will be aware of any procedures or issues specific to his or her hospital.
4. Be prepared to listen to the situation or diagnosis with the individual you are visiting, but refrain from giving opinions or advice. Never pass judgement on the nature or quality of medical care being provided.
5. Be prepared to meet with friends or family members who may be visiting at the same time as you are. Keep in mind that these people may or may not hold the same religious beliefs as the person you are visiting.
6. Discussions with a patient, their family, or friends should be held in strict confidence. Visitors must treat all information and communications obtained while visiting as strictly confidential and should not disclose them to anyone except where required by law or where given written consent by the individual(s) involved. When discussing the details of a particular situation with a supervisor, the identity of the people involved must be protected.

7. If a nurse or doctor comes to engage the patient in discussion or treatment, excuse yourself to a waiting area until the conversation is finished, unless specifically requested to remain by the patient or the health care professional.
8. If a patient requires assistance to use the washroom, or to get out of bed, seek the help of a nurse or orderly. Never attempt to help the person on your own.
9. Do not take the person away from the hospital or nursing home for a walk or in your car unless specifically arranged in advance as part of the visit and approved, in advance, both by your supervisor and the appropriate authorities at the hospital or nursing home. If driving a person to appointments or errands is part of the stated ministry, drivers must hold a valid driver's license and insurance. Seat belts must be available for all passengers. Drivers must not have any alcohol or drugs in their system when driving. If possible, driving ministries should be team ministries to avoid being alone in a car with a vulnerable person.
10. People making hospital or nursing home visits should be aware of their own level of competence and avoid working in areas for which they are unqualified.