



COVID-19 Communication Resource

Communicating Restricted Visitor Policies with Empathy and Respect

COMMUNICATING POLICY UPDATES

Many loved ones will understand the need to limit visitors during this time of heightened safety measures. But understanding doesn't alleviate their concern for their loved ones or their desire to support them when they are in the hospital. When communicating about restrictive visitor policies:

- **Start with why.** Explain why the policy exists. This is likely a combination of concern for safety and/or local or national regulations. Refer to your sources (e.g. CDC, local health authorities, county restrictions).
- **State the policy clearly.** State in clear terms: Are visitors allowed? At what times are they allowed? What, if any, precautions must they take? How will they be screened? What, if any, exceptions will be made (e.g. mother/baby, end-of-life, pediatrics)? When were the policies enacted and how long will they last?
- **Tell them that you care.** Let them know you understand that this new policy is challenging, but necessary for everyone's safety and well-being. Explain when you will revisit the policy and that you will return to more open policies as soon as it's in patients', visitors', and team members' best interests. Thank them for their thoughtful cooperation.
- **Tell them what they can do to stay connected (see below).** Tell them what resources are available to stay connected with loved ones. Can they use phones? Is video conferencing or monitoring available? Is WiFi enabled to support personal technology?
- **Archive out-of-date information.** In the rush to post new Coronavirus policy changes, many sites leave contradictory headings or policy descriptions in place. Prevent confusion and frustration by changing headings and archiving policies that aren't relevant at the current time.

MAINTAINING CONNECTION

It's still important for patient and caregiver well-being that patients be able to connect with their loved ones – and with their care teams – if at all possible. Telemedicine and HIPAA regulations are being relaxed to allow greater use of technology to facilitate communication. Help patients and loved ones be effective and thoughtful communicators via technology:

- Suggest guidelines for patients communicating with loved ones, including:
 - Times/places where video chat is okay (respect for quiet hours and fellow patient privacy).
 - Use of headphones/earpieces and quiet voices for video chat (consider if/how you will facilitate patients acquiring headphones/earpieces if they don't have them and aren't allowed visitors).
 - When/whether it's okay to ask a care team member to confer with a loved one.
- Suggest best practices for loved ones if you will use video or phone for care team consultation:
 - Set clear time windows for when you will connect. Ask for patience with any uncertain time windows.
 - Suggest they download and test software ahead of time, if applicable/possible.
 - Suggest they prepare questions ahead of time to make the "visit" effective.
 - Let them know whether recording and sharing is okay. Note that recording and sharing may help mitigate additional phone calls or requests for updates.