

CITY HOSPITALS SUNDERLAND NHS FOUNDATION TRUST

DIRECTORATE OF NURSING & QUALITY

BOARD OF GOVERNORS

MAY 2005

PROPOSAL TO ALTER PATIENT VISITING HOURS

Introduction

The debate about reducing Health Care Associated Infection (HCAI) and improving standards of cleanliness in NHS hospitals has focused attention on the role of visitors and policies on visiting.

Visitors play an important part in the care and recovery of patients and City Hospitals encourages an open visiting approach and active involvement of visitors in the patient's care, if that is their wish. However, the modern day culture of unrestricted visiting is creating difficulties for patients in terms of reducing rest and recovery time, interrupting meals and compromising privacy during the delivery of care and treatment.

Furthermore, unrestricted visiting may actually mitigate attempts to improve the cleanliness of ward environments as it can interfere with cleaning schedules. Against this background, a change to visiting times is proposed that achieves the right balance between patient need and the needs of the service (giving care, access to cleaning, etc).

Current Arrangements

Unrestricted visiting was introduced at City Hospitals several years ago. The intention was to provide flexibility for visitors, acknowledging that they play an important part in the care and recovery of the patient. It is important that we continue to support visitors to do this if that is the patient's wish.

However in practice there have been a number of difficulties encountered:

- Long protracted visiting periods (in some cases all day) that interfere with a patients rest and recuperation.
- Clinical staff unable to access the patient at the bedside which can hinder the delivery of care and treatment.
- Aggressive approach from some visitors who resent being asked by clinical staff to leave the bedside, even for a short time.

- Privacy and dignity may be compromised, i.e visitors overhearing conversations of other patients or when patients confined to bed require the use of the toilet
- Some visitors bring takeaway food and drinks to eat at the bedside that creates health and safety and infection control risks.
- Domestic cleaning is made very difficult due to the large numbers of visitors congregating around the bedside and surrounding floor space.
- With increased visitor numbers, due to insufficient space around the bed many visitors sit on the patient's bed. This brings with it potential risks of infection.

Patients and Staff Views

The Clinical Governance Department recently undertook a survey of patient and staff experience of hospital visiting. A questionnaire was sent to 125 patients recently discharged from hospital (October 2004) and members of the CHS Community Panel, the chair of the PPI Forum and the Carers Centre. A similar electronic version was sent to a range of staff groups, including Ward Managers, Business Managers, Clinical Directors and Matrons, etc.

The survey found that:

- 44% of patients and 68% of staff stated visiting times were too long
- Majority of patients (71%) and staff (69%) thought a morning was the best time to have a break from visitors, as well as being the preferred time to have floor areas cleaned (92% patients, 36% staff)
- Majority of patients (95%) supported 'protected mealtimes'
- Majority of patients and staff (79% and 73%) felt that only 2-3 visitors should be allowed at the same time

Additional comments from patients/relatives/Community Panel/PPI Forum confirmed many of the assumed problems of unrestricted visiting:

- Preventing care being given to patients, peace and quiet on wards, proper cleaning being done that can contribute to MRSA.
- Patients who do not have visitors are unable to rest. People do not want to offend visitors – as they may not visit at home – so a structured time for all visits may be better for all concerned
- Carers may also feel guilty if they fail to fully utilise visiting times.
- Times should be restricted to allow the professional and support staff to do their work.
- Too long a range of visiting times, together with no restriction on numbers makes it difficult to maintain standards of cleanliness and hygiene.

Many of these issues were also highlighted by CHS clinical staff:

- Often too many visitors, meaning the patient is often not able to sleep/rest after surgery/recovery from illness. This situation makes it difficult for staff to deliver care. Meals are often interrupted and multiple visitors often disturb other patients.
- Some patients relatives (especially elderly patients relatives) feel that because visiting is available all day they are under obligation to be with their partner/spouse for as long a period as possible - this can prove very wearying for both.
- Domestic staff cannot fully clean ward environments as there are always visitors around these areas.
- If patients need to use a bedside commode or bedpan when visitors are present this can cause great embarrassment even if relatives are asked to leave the area – patients feel that everyone will ‘know what they are doing’.

Governors Views

Governors at the workshop held in November to discuss the proposed Annual Plan also expressed concern about HCAI and the impact that unrestricted visiting may have on infection rates and the ability to maintain and improve cleanliness. Whilst Governors were supportive of an open approach to visiting they felt that some restrictions whilst ensuring flexibility would be extremely beneficial.

Other Hospital Approaches

Across the NHS, other hospitals are reviewing their own visiting arrangements and shifting from an open approach to set visiting periods. The driver is the need to prevent the spread of infection and ensure strict cleaning operations are not hampered.

Whilst moving towards set visiting periods and a restriction on numbers of visitors, revised visiting policies all make it clear that there is room for flexibility to suit individual circumstances, i.e the relative coming from a distance who visits outside set times.

Proposal

It is proposed to reduce visiting hours at City Hospitals so that patients have enough rest, recovery time and privacy, to allow doctors and nurses to provide care and treatment, to enable patients to eat meals without interruptions and to enable cleaning activities to take place in the wards.

The proposed visiting hours provide three hours in the afternoon and two hours each evening (2 – 5 pm and 6 – 8 pm). Some people may need to visit outside these times and this will be arranged with ward staff on an individual basis. These set visiting periods will be consistently adopted across the Trust. These hours will achieve a balance of enabling patients to have quality time with visitors and also to have a rest interval and protected meal breaks

Visitors who are attending specifically to help their friend/relative during meals will be welcome with the patient's permission.

Full details regarding the proposed new arrangements are outlined in Appendix 1 'Information for Visitors'. Providing this information to visitors will enable them to understand the reasons for the change and also to know the important part that they can play in the care of the patient.

The visitor information will be available at the entrance to the hospital and all ward entrances as well as on City Hospitals Website.

Conclusion

Visitors play an important part in the care and recovery of patients and City Hospitals will continue to encourage visiting and active involvement of visitors in the patient's care.

We have learned many lessons since introducing open visiting. The modern day visiting culture has created a 'free for all' atmosphere on the wards and created problems that has directly affected patient care, their recovery and experience. The need to improve standards of cleanliness and reduce hospital infection has also sharpened the focus on the need for a change to current visiting patterns.

Having set visiting periods will allow patients to have enough rest, recovery time and privacy, to allow doctors and nurses to provide care and treatment to all patients at all times, to enable patients to eat meals without interruptions and to enable cleaning activities to take place in the wards.

Recommendations

The Board of Governors is asked to support the proposals outlined in the paper and the enclosed Information for Visitors leaflet.

Carol Harries
Head of Corporate Affairs

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INFORMATION FOR VISITORS

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Introduction

City Hospitals Sunderland actively encourages visiting and the involvement of carers whilst patients are in hospital. There are many ways in which visitors can help patient care, such as help at mealtimes for those patients who need assistance, and we will be happy to support visitors to do so if that is the patient's wish.

Visiting Patients

The reason for restricting visiting times is to allow patients to have enough rest, recovery time and privacy, to allow doctors and nurses to provide care and treatment to all patients at all times, to enable patients to eat meals without interruptions and to enable cleaning activities to take place in the wards.

We recognise that some people may need to visit outside the hours outlined below and this can be arranged with ward staff.

Children are welcome if they do not have coughs, colds, tummy upsets or other infections. They need to be escorted both within the ward and outside. On occasions visiting may be restricted if it is considered your child may be at risk of infection. The nurse in charge will inform you of this on arrival.

Please co-ordinate your visits with friends and family so that there are only 2 people at the bedside at any time. The more visitors a patient has the higher the risk of bringing infection from the outside. If you can, please have a shower or bath before coming to visit.

There will be a special hand cleaner at the entrance to each ward and also at the patient's bedside (adult wards only). Please use this before visiting your friend or relative. Ask a nurse if you are not sure how to use this.

Please do not sit on the patient's bed when visiting as this increases risks of infection to the patient. There will be two chairs available for each patient's visitors.

If you have a cough, cold, stomach upset or any other possibly infectious condition, please DO NOT VISIT

All enquiries about your relative/friend's condition should be referred to the named nurse or nurse in charge of the ward. Arrangements can be made to see a member of the medical staff on request-please just ask your relative/friend's named nurse.

Protected Mealtimes

We aim to provide mealtimes for patients free from avoidable and unnecessary interruptions. The wards are closed to visitors at mealtimes. Visitors who are attending specifically to help their friend/relative during meals will be welcome with the patient's permission.

Any other reasons to visit during protected mealtimes would need to be arranged with the Nurse in Charge of the ward.

Visiting Times

If these times are difficult for you, please tell the Nurse in Charge of the ward who will arrange alternative times. Close friends and family members may visit seriously ill patients at any time.

Wards

Daily between 2 pm until 5 pm in the afternoon and 6 pm until 8 pm in the evening. Visiting out of these hours can be arranged at the discretion of the Nurse in Charge of the ward and Medical Team involved with your relative/friend's care, providing this does not effect the care of other patients.

Please do not feel that you have to stay for the whole of this time. Remember that the patient needs rest.

Intensive Care Unit and Coronary Care Unit

Visiting arrangements will be discussed on an individual basis with family and friends.

Children's Wards

Parents are invited to stay with their child during the hospital stay. Other visitors with the parent's permission can visit between 8 am until 8 pm

Parents are invited to use the staff dining room for meals. However if you are not able to leave your child there is a parent's sitting room with tea and coffee facilities that you can use for your meals.

Maternity

Partners are welcome to visit between 10 am and 8 pm. All other visitors are welcome between 2 pm and 5 pm or 6 pm and 8 pm.

Presents for Patients

Patients often like to receive gifts whilst in hospital, but please bear in mind because of health and safety reasons, we cannot allow cooked food to be brought in to hospital without the permission of the Nurse in Charge or Matron who will discuss this with the catering manager.

You are welcome, however, to bring gifts, for example, fruits, sweets, books and magazines and telephone cards for Patientline, which is the bedside television and telephone facility provided for patients. The Nurse in Charge will tell you if there is anything the patient should not have.

Restaurant Facilities for Visitors

There is a café on the main concourse just inside the main entrance. When this is closed visitors are very welcome to use the staff dining room located on A floor.

Please do not take food or drinks back to the ward with you. Not only does this create a health and safety risk due to spillages on corridor floors, it also compromises patient care.

Medical Information

If you require information on a patient, the doctors and nurses will wish to know what your relationship with the patient is, and seek his, or her, permission before speaking to you in any detail about the condition and treatment.

Telephone Enquiries

Please try to share information with other members of your family and friends. Arrange for just one of you to phone the ward staff for information and then pass the news onto every one else.

We cannot give detailed medical information over the telephone, but the Nurse in Charge can say how your friend or relative is getting on. If your relative or friend is having an operation, the Nurse in Charge of the ward will tell you what is the best time to ring after the operation to find out how they are.

The Trust has now installed Patient Line at every bedside which enables patients to have 24hr access to both the television and a telephone facility. Once your relative/friend has been admitted to the ward they will be advised of their personal telephone number which you can ring to speak directly to

them at any time. There is a charge which you will incur should you use this facility.

Mobile Phones

Mobile phones emit signals which can interfere with medical equipment and harm patients. We therefore ask you to switch off your mobile phones in the hospital.

Smoking

Please note that we have a no smoking policy and we ask that you do not smoke inside the hospital or in the grounds.

Smoking is only permitted in designated smoking shelters in the grounds and we ask patients and visitors to respect this policy at all times. Smoking is not permitted outside the main entrance.