

VISITORS TO THE MEDICAL CENTER

1. PURPOSE:

a. To provide guidelines for visitors which can promote patient emotional and psychological well-being, an important component of Patient-Family Centered Care.

b. This policy does not address business-related visitors, such as vendors, pharmaceutical salespersons, or the media, which are covered in other policies.

2. POLICY:

a. Birmingham VA Medical Center (VAMC) has an open visitation policy. There are no restrictions on visiting hours, length of visiting time, age of visitors, or the number of family members or significant others on any unit except as noted below. Children under 14 years of age must be accompanied by and under the direct supervision of an adult in all areas of the medical center, someone other than the patient or staff. Guide dogs are permitted in all areas of the medical center.

b. The medical center respects the patient's right to make decisions about his or her care, treatment and services, and to involve the patient's family in care, services, and treatment decisions to the extent permitted by the patient or surrogate decision-maker. 'Family' is defined as a group of two or more persons united by blood, or adoptive, marital, domestic partnership, or other legal ties. The family may also be a person or persons not legally related to the individual (such as significant other, friend or caregiver whom the individual considers to be family). A family member may be the surrogate decision-maker, as defined in VHA Handbook 1004.02, if authorized to make care decisions for the individual, should he or she lose decision-making capacity. The medical center allows a family member, friend, or other individual to be present with the patient for emotional support during the course of a stay. The medical center allows for the presence of a support individual of the patient's choice, unless the individual's presence infringes on others' rights or safety, or is medically or therapeutically contraindicated. The individual may or may not be the patient's surrogate decision-maker or legally authorized representative. The hospital prohibits discrimination based on age, race, ethnicity, religion, culture, language, physical or mental disability, socioeconomic status, sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity or expression.

c. Visitations in the Emergency Department (ED) will be permitted at the discretion of the charge nurse or attending physician, based on the ED activity and the care requirements of all ED patients. Visitation may be delayed or visitors may be asked

to leave the treatment area because of patient activity in the ED. Exceptions will be made in cases of dying individuals or home caregivers who accompany the patient.

d. Visitors with obvious communicable disease or conditions (i.e., runny nose, coughing, rash, fever) should not visit for the protection of other patients. Physicians imposing individual visiting restrictions for medical reasons should enter an order in the patient's medical record. Infection Control can impose medical center-wide visiting restrictions based on outbreaks, such as influenza. Radiation Safety can impose visiting restrictions based on therapy modalities. In cases where limits on visitation may need to be set, the unit nursing staff will contact the Charge Nurse, Nurse Manager, Acting Nurse Manager, or the Nurse Coordinator who should be the one to interact with the patient and/or family. It is desirable for clinical staff to attempt resolution of visiting issues with patients and/or families first before contacting a VA Police Officer.

e. Overnight occupancy of the medical center by relatives and/or significant others of patients is permitted in private rooms on the medical-surgical units (4 Main, 5 Main, Safe Harbor, and 6B). Overnight visitors must remain in appropriate street clothes; pajamas or nightgowns are not permitted. Overnight occupancy is not permitted in semi-private rooms, the Intensive Care Units (ICUs), or the ED. Family members/significant others are allowed to stay overnight in ICU and ED waiting areas.

f. Bringing outside food to patients is discouraged due to dietary restrictions and safety reasons. Refrigerated food will not be stored in the nourishment refrigerators due to health and safety reasons, except on Safe Harbor. (See MCM 120-04, Food Safety for Patients.)

g. Families are not permitted to take photographs of their family members. Only VA employees, contractors or business associates are permitted to obtain PVVR (photograph, video, voice, or other recordings) of Veterans, patients, or VA employees when on VA property. Visitors or other non-VA personnel are not permitted to obtain PVVR of patients unless specifically authorized by the Medical Center Director or designee.

h. Accidents involving visitors to the medical center will be reported by the supervisor of the area in which the accident occurred electronically via VA Form 2162, *Report of Accident, Injury, Occupational Illness or Fire*. In all instances, a visitor who suffers an accident, or appears to be injured in any way, should be taken to the ED for examination and treatment; however, reporting to the ED is voluntary by the visitor and may incur a charge to their insurance. If the visitor is seriously injured, the physician nearest the accident will give necessary first aid care prior to transport to the ED.

3. ACTION

a. Police Service will have overall responsibility for enforcing visiting guidelines and security in the medical center.

b. Area employees will be responsible for monitoring visiting guidelines in their areas, keeping open visitation principles in mind.

c. Social Work will maintain a current list of local lodging facilities, that can be distributed to families by the Administrative Officer of the Day (AOD) or obtained by a Nurse Manager or Nurse Coordinator. Social workers will be responsible for handling referrals, counseling, and advising visitors undergoing extreme hardship in finding alternative lodging.

4. REFERENCES:

VHA Handbook 1004.02, Advance Care Planning and Management of Advance Directives.

MCM 00-S-01, Safety, Occupational Health, and Fire Protection Program.

MCM 07-01, Package Inspections.

MCM 07-04, Hours of Business and Building Security.

MCM 120-04, Food Safety for Patients.

5. RESPONSIBLE SERVICE: Police Service is responsible for the content, update, and recertification of this MCM.

6. RESCISSION: MCM 07-18, Visitors to the Medical Center, dated April 19, 2010.

7. REISSUE: This policy will be reissued on or before March 2015.



Rica Lewis-Payton, MHA, FACHE
Medical Center Director