

# VISITING PEOPLE IN THE HOSPITAL

Handout from Training for Lay Hospital Visitors

Most of you have visited the sick and brought comfort for many years. For those new to this ministry, here are some guidelines designed to help you.

1. It is always best to knock before entering a private room, or to slowly enter in the case of semi-private or ward rooms.
2. Whenever possible, pull a chair alongside the bed and sit down. This allows eye-level contact, and gives the message that you have come to be with them, and that you have time for them.
3. Unless no other arrangement is possible, do not sit or lean on the patient's bed, since this can cause them discomfort.
4. Be sure you are not sitting with a window behind you (the glare of the light behind you makes it hard for the patient to see you). Should there be no other option, you might ask the patient for permission to draw the drapes, and then remember to reopen them when you leave.
5. Let the patient share their understanding of their illness and do not ask probing questions about diagnosis. It is their privilege to keep this information private. Should they share their circumstances with you, remember the utmost importance of confidentiality. Unless they instruct you otherwise, your business is keeping their business confidential. Nothing should be shared without their explicit consent.
6. Be sensitive to the needs of the patient and adjust the length of your visit accordingly. For example, a shorter visit might be best with a post-operative patient.
7. Don't take food or drink to patients. If a patient asks you to give them a drink, or something to eat, consult with the nursing staff before doing so – unless it is obvious that it is allowed. If a sign marked "NPO" is at the head of the bed, this means the patient is allowed nothing by mouth.
8. Keep the focus on the interests and sensitivities of the patient. While you want to help and may have particular ways in mind, let the *patient* control what happens. You are a guest in *their* home. One way of respecting that reality is to ask, "Is there any way that I can be of spiritual encouragement to you?"
9. If you pray with the patient, stay for a while afterward, in order to address any personal concerns which may have arisen in the patient's thoughts through prayer, or any emotions that may have surfaced. Prayer is not an exit tool, but rather a doorway to relationship, healing and wholeness.
10. Wash your hands before your visit and afterward. Turn off the tap with a paper towel.
11. If a patient wants to be transferred (i.e. from bed to chair), ask the staff to help them. Do not do it yourself, as you do not have the training (or specific information) to perform transfers for a hospital patient.
12. Never remove restraints.
13. When leaving, return things to their position when you arrived.

**Thank you for helping patients to feel cared for, and for drawing them into the healing presence of God – through God's living presence in you, and sometimes through the Word, and through prayer.**