

Visitors Policy

Effective: October 2007 Reviewed: October 2010 Next Review: December 2011

1. Introduction

The Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust cares for many vulnerable patients and must provide an appropriate environment for the delivery of its high quality care. The Trust is continuously striving to minimise and reduce the risk of Health Care Acquired Infections (HCAI) whilst providing visitor access to relatives, carers and friends.

This policy is supported by a visitor information leaflet, which is available in all clinical areas throughout the Trust. It is the responsibility of the Sister/Charge Nurse to ensure that the leaflet is visible and available to all patients, relatives, carers and friends.

2. Principles

This policy details arrangements to support specific patient needs in a safe, clean and comforting environment. Visitors are asked to respect the following:

- Visiting times
- Infection control guidance
- Equality and diversity
- Privacy and dignity

2.1 Visiting Times

Visiting access is restricted to allow patients time to receive treatment /care, recover, rest and eat meals without interruption. Clinical interventions should be minimised as far as possible during visiting times.

Visiting times must be displayed at ward entrances. In most areas these are:
2pm - 4pm
6pm - 8pm

The Sister/Charge Nurse is the gatekeeper in the application of this policy and may make allowance in exceptional circumstances to allow visiting outside these times. Circumstances when this may occur include:

- When a patient is receiving palliative care and specific support and care is required.
- In specific circumstances to support a patient, e.g. a vulnerable patient.
- Paediatric patients.
- Maternity patients.
- Critical Care patients.

Visiting times should reflect the needs of the general patient group of each speciality. Over stimulation and fatigue should be avoided. Some areas have

designated rest periods which must be respected. It is the responsibility of the ward Sister/Charge Nurse via ward staff to communicate these times to visitors.

2.2 Infection Control Guidance

In order to minimise the risk of HCAI, staff must ensure that:

- A maximum of 2 people visit at any one time, unless special permission is granted by the ward sister/charge nurse.
- Visitors must not visit if they have an infection e.g. cough, cold, diarrhoea and vomiting. They must be symptom free for 48 hours prior to returning to the ward and must seek advice from the ward Sister/Charge Nurse if unsure.
- Visitors must use alcohol hand gel on entry to, and on leaving, any adult ward/unit the ward unless the visitor is suffering from a skin condition e.g. eczema, dermatitis, where hands must be washed with liquid soap
- Visitors to any children's ward/unit must wash their hands with soap and water on entry to and on leaving the ward/unit the ward. (Alcohol hand gel is not available because of the risk it poses to children if misused).
- Visitors must not sit / lie on the bed.
- Visitors must not use the patients' toilets.
- Toiletries, tissues, towels etc. must not be shared with other patients.
- Visitors are prohibited from touching wounds or medical devices.
- Visitation of young children is limited to circumstances relating to improved patient care, e.g. in the interests of the patient or the child. The sister/charge nurse should agree all requests. Children must be supervised at all times.

Occasionally visiting may be further restricted due to an outbreak of infection. In the event of an Outbreak, the ward Sister/Charge Nurse must ensure that this is clearly conveyed by appropriate signage at the entrance of the ward and appropriate Infection Control processes are in place for all visitors to follow.

2.3 Privacy and Dignity

The provision of privacy and dignity for patients is an essential aspect of care and a very high priority for the Trust. Visitors must be asked to respect patients' privacy and dignity at all times. Visitors should be asked to leave the room/bay when necessary.

2.4 Equality and Diversity

The promotion of equality and respect for diversity is fundamental to the Trust and visitors, staff and patients are asked to respect this at all times.

2.5 Pets

In very exceptional circumstances pets may be allowed into the clinical area at the discretion of the ward sister/charge nurse. Please refer to the Animals in Hospital Policy.

3. Application

The following additional policies support guidance detailed in the Visitors Information Leaflet:

- Hand Hygiene
- Car Parking
- Smoke Free
- Animals in Hospitals
- Patients' Property
- Food Hygiene
- Mobile Phones and Medical Devices

The Trust has a zero tolerance policy for abuse of any staff, patients or relatives. Contravention of the Trust Policy "Management of Violence and Aggression at Work" may lead to sanctions ranging from limitation of visiting rights to an outright ban. In extreme circumstances Trust security staff or the Police may be called.

Further advice on the implementation of this policy can be obtained from Matrons or the Heads of Nursing.