

## Patient and Family Visitation

Visitation is a vital component to the well-being of our Veteran patients and their families. At VA Palo Alto Health Care System (VAPAHCS), we promote a welcoming environment that is supportive, and involve individuals of their choice in care planning and visitation.

- We respect 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.
- A family member, friend or other individual may 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.
- VAPAHCS prohibits discrimination based on age, race, ethnicity, religion, culture, language, physical or mental disability, socioeconomic status, sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity or expression.

Patients are allowed to determine their own visiting hours in collaboration with the medical care team. Family preferences are allowed when a patient is unable to communicate their visitation preferences.

- We want to provide the patient with control over the circumstances of their own care, and to provide a supportive and therapeutic environment for their optimal well-being.
- Visitors entering VAPAHCS are expected to conduct themselves in a quiet and orderly manner, so as not to disrupt other patients or routine operations.
- Visiting hours may be reexamined for each patient based upon his/her needs and through collaboration with the patient, family, and care provider(s).
- VAPAHCS personnel may determine times when a patient's room or an entire unit must be closed for procedures or emergencies.
- VAPAHCS personnel may ask visitors to leave the unit if there is concern that their presence may seriously hinder the provision of care.
- VAPAHCS personnel may determine that a visitor's presence infringes on others' rights, safety, or well-being, or is medically or therapeutically contraindicated.

### Adherence to the Family Pet Visitation Policy and Service Animal/Guide Dog Policy

- Family pets may visit patient/residents during their admission to the health care system in specified areas. The established family pet visitation protocol must be followed to ensure that a hazard-free, healthy environment exists for the patient, resident, and the visiting family pet. Refer to HCSM, "Family Pet Visitation Policy".
- Animals that function as a trained service animal or guide dog are allowed access to health care system facilities that are otherwise accessible to all patients, visitors, volunteers, and employees. Refer to HCSM, "Service Animal/Guide Dog Policy".

### Visitors: Prevent the Spread of Infection

- In an effort to protect patients and employees from exposure to respiratory illness, all individuals who have symptoms of a cold or flu, including fever (100 degrees Fahrenheit or above) are requested not to visit.
- Proper hand hygiene is the best defense to prevent the spread of infection. VAPAHCS encourages frequent hand hygiene, especially before and after patient contact, or after coughing or sneezing, and has placed hand sanitizing gels throughout patient care areas to facilitate proper hand hygiene.