

Family Presence

Why Family Presence Matters

Receiving healthcare can be a source of significant stress for patients. In healthcare facilities and programs, a patient's designated family/support person(s) are important partners in patient care. These are individuals who a patient identifies as essential support and who they want to have participate in aspects of their care, including developing their care plan and providing physical, emotional and spiritual support.

When the patient's designated family/support person(s) are present, they provide invaluable assistance to ensure a patient is comfortable, supported and their needs are being met. They are also an important source of information about the patient's health history, preferences and care needs.

Purpose

The following information offers guidance for how the healthcare team can ensure a patient's designated family/support person(s) are welcomed, appreciated and a key partner in care.

Your first contact with family/support persons

Patients are encouraged to identify **at least two** designated family/support person(s) who need to be documented on their chart. When you first interact with these individuals:

- Introduce yourself: Share your name, your role and what you are there to do.
- Ask for their name, relationship to the patient and the support they provide.
- Let them know they are welcome to be there at any time based on patient preference. There are no "visiting hours" for designated family/support person(s), unless there is a need to respond to health or safety concern, or at the request of a patient.
- Thank them for being there. Kindness often fosters kindness in return.

Explore participation

The designated family/support person(s) are present because they care about the patient and may be unsure how they can help and afraid to ask. Alternatively, they may have an extensive caregiving role and may be used to performing direct patient care regularly.

- Take time up front to discuss with the patient and their designated family/support person(s) how they want to participate (e.g., feeding, personal care, mobilizing and discharge discussions).

- Ensure designated family/support person(s) are oriented, enabled to support care when it is safe and that they are aware of activities where they should seek help.

Encourage designated family/support people to partner in care

The designated family/support person(s) often have a lifetime of experience with the patient. By supporting them to be a partner in the patient's care, you are contributing to increasing patient safety and improving the patient and family experience.

- Include them in conversation when they are present.
- Seek their advice on patient preferences and specific care needs.
- Ask them about their observations on changes in the patient's health status.
- Enable them to share safety concerns and advocate for patient needs.
- Enable them to participate with recovery and daily care based on patient preference and the designated family/support person(s) comfort level.
- Include them in care planning, bedside rounds and discharge planning.

Comfort

Designated family/support person(s) may be hungry, thirsty, exhausted and needing to use the bathroom, as they are often putting the patient's needs ahead of their own.

- Ensure they know the locations of washrooms, cafeterias and quiet spaces.
- Offer a pillow, blanket and the most comfortable chair you can.
- Invite them to take breaks to take care of their personal needs.
- Check in to see how they are doing and if they need support.

Learn more

Visit our [Family Presence Policy Suite](#) website for additional resources on family presence. If you have questions or require further support, email at us at patient.engagement@ahs.ca.

