



Family Presence: Information Sharing & Privacy

Ensuring patients and designated family/support persons have the information needed to alleviate anxieties and make decisions is a priority for family presence practice. Sharing of health information needs to follow patient direction and AHS confidentiality and privacy policies, in ways that support designated family/support persons as partners in patient care.

What can I share with the designated family/support person when the patient cannot consent?

If the family/support person will be caring for the patient, provide the support with the information needed to make informed decisions about care choices. For example, if the patient is being discharged, disclosure of essential information to a family/support person may be necessary in order for them to provide care. (s.35(1)(b) Health Information Act Guidelines and Practice Manual 2011)

What can I share with a family member or those in a close relationship without consent?

You can disclose the patient's location, present condition, diagnosis, progress and prognosis on that day. The disclosure must not be contrary to the express request of the patient. If an adult patient has asked to not disclose their prognosis, then unless there was a requirement by law, or a medical emergency, the health care provider would respect that request. (s.35(1)(c) Health Information Act Guidelines and Practice Manual 2011)

Did You Know?

AHS has a [Family Presence and Visitation Policy Suite](#) available on Insite



Safeguards for sharing information:

Ask the patient the names of people with whom medical information can be shared, and have a system for documenting this.

- Ask patients what information they wish to share.
- If you're in a shared space, keep your voice low and limit sensitive information that could be overheard.
- Ask for verbal consent to have the conversation at that time.
- When needed, offer a private area to the patient and designated family/support persons to discuss personal information.

Scenarios

A new nurse joins the ICU staff and suggests that they should begin doing change of shift rounds at the bedside with designated family/support person(s) present. The Nurse Manager and some staff are concerned about Health Information Act (HIA) implications since the unit does not have private rooms.

It is not a violation of HIA to share information at the bedside and involve the patient and their care partners in care planning and decision-making. Patients own their own health information and with consent, it can be shared with whom they wish. The hospital should be clear in its standard processes and practices that the patient and designated family/support persons have access to information, and that participation in care planning and decision-making are essential aspects of the care model in support of family presence practice.

A health care provider walks into a hospital room to go over a patient's test results with them. There are two younger people sitting on the bed next to the patient who appear to be their sons. One of the young men jumps up and says, "Do you have the test results?"

The patient should be asked about having others present when results are discussed. This can be done in an affirming way. For example, the health care provider might say, "Who do I have the pleasure of meeting today?" The health care provider can then indicate that they are going to discuss test results and ask if the patient wants the others in the room with them. The physician can then share and discuss the information with the patient while the designated family/support persons are present.

The above scenarios are adapted from the Healthcare Excellence Canada Better Together resources

Opportunities for involving patients and designated family/support persons in information sharing:

- Admission
- Patient family orientation
- Bedside shift report
- Rounds
- Goal setting and care planning
- Case conferences
- Discharge planning and education

Check these related resources:

- Collection, Access, Use and Disclosure of Information Policy
- Privacy Protection and Information Access Policy
- Consent to Disclose Health Information Form
- Guidelines for Staff Regarding Audio Video Recordings
- Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act
- Advanced Care Planning and Goals of Care Designation Policy and Procedure
- Privacy Pointers
- Health Information Act

Safe and effective information sharing includes communicating in the preferred language of the patient and designated family/support person(s). For information on patient translation services in AHS, visit [Interpretation & Translation Services | Insite](#)

For information and support contact:
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