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I'm Sure You Said...

Susan E. Murray
Andrews University

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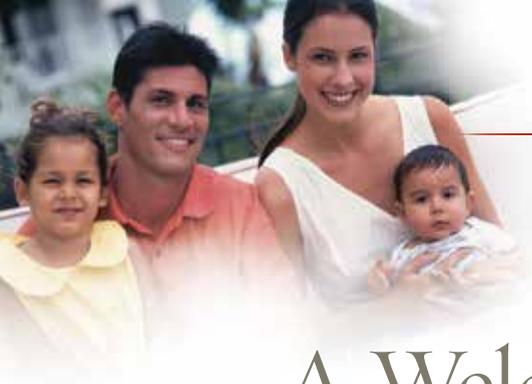


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FAMILY TIES

A Welcome Hospital Visitor

BY SUSAN E. MURRAY

Most visitors mean well, but too many get it wrong. They head to the hospital to visit the sick without giving it much thought. There are things you should do to help make experience both positive and safe for you and the patient. Your relationship with the patient and familiarity with the hospital's policies and procedures make a difference. Visit the hospital's website beforehand to learn current visitation policies.

When you arrive, check in with the nurses station to be sure it is a good time to visit, and find out how many visitors the patient has had already for the day. Too many visitors wear on the patient, and it may be better to leave a note for them to read later.

Don't wake the patient or enter if hospital staff is in the room. If the door is closed, check with the nurse to be sure you should enter. Be sure to wash your hands or use sanitizer before each visit. When you enter the room, note the time and plan to stay 20 minutes or less. Making physical contact and sitting down, rather than standing at the end of the bed, make for a more comfortable visit. Turn off your cell phone, or put it on vibrate, and be fully present.

Let the patient guide the topic of conversation, allowing them to decide if they want to tell you how they are feeling. If staff comes into the room, excuse yourself unless you are there as an official advocate.

If other visitors are in the room, it's important to focus on the patient. Sometimes visitors get so involved in their own conversations that the patient goes almost unnoticed. Be aware that even if a patient is heavily sedated, they may observe what's happening in the room.

Gifts can uplift a patient's spirit, but be careful. Some hospitals don't allow fresh flowers, fresh fruit, or latex balloons. Some helpful items for patients include lip balm, pen



and notepad, a sleep mask, and even clean underwear! A Scripture verse written greeting card will be welcomed by most. Gifts of service can include offering to care for a pet, picking up the mail, cancelling an appointment, or offering to just sit quietly while the patient closes their eyes and rests in your presence.

What isn't helpful is for a visitor to

make the offer, "Call me if there's something we can do." Love is specific!

Some hospitals allow children to visit, but be sure that is the patient's desire. Little ones can bring great joy in times of distress but, for some, they cause needless discomfort and can be carriers of other germs and infections. If you are not well yourself, consider a phone call or card. Even if you cannot visit in person, your prayers will be appreciated.

As you prepare to leave, offering to pray for the patient can be powerful and comforting for all. If the patient so desires, a short prayer is in order. Consider sharing, *Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need* (Hebrews 4:16 KJV).

Susan E. Murray is a professor emerita of behavioral sciences at Andrews University, certified family life educator and licensed marriage and family therapist.

Note: People can share updates, photos and videos, connecting with friends and family who care and want to help, with free sites such as <http://CaringBridge.org>