

"When a Loved One Needs Critical Care"

AACN supports including family members as partners in the care of critically ill patients.

- DO** read the Patient and Family Rights and Responsibilities document that the hospital provides each patient. This document, required of the hospital by law, details your rights as a patient and outlines the responsibilities of the hospital with regard to patient care.
- DO** designate one member of the family as the primary point of contact for the nurse. This will allow the nurse to spend more time taking care of the patient and less time on the phone repeating information to different family members.
- DO** make it a point to know who is taking care of your loved one. You will encounter a sea of people wearing scrubs in the hospital—if a staff member does not have an ID badge visible, ask for their name and what they do.
- DO** ask the nurse what you should expect the first time you visit your loved one. This information will help prepare you for the activity level, monitors and equipment associated with a critical care unit.
- DO** keep a notebook handy. During this stressful time, a notebook is a useful tool to remember questions you want to ask and information you need to share with family members.
- DO** talk with your family member's nurse if you feel your visitation is too restricted. Research has shown that more liberal visitation is best for the patient and more satisfying for the family—communicate with the nursing staff to work out a mutually beneficial arrangement.
- DO** keep the patient's safety and wellness in mind when visiting. Familiarize yourself with standard safety precautions (the rails of the bed should be in the raised position when you leave the bedside), and refrain from visiting if you are ill with a potentially contagious illness.
- DO** take care of yourself during the patient's recovery process. Fuel your body through proper diet, get an adequate amount of sleep, and take some time away from the hospital. This will enable you to provide the best healing support for your loved one.
- DO** utilize available support services. This is an overwhelming and stressful time and you may feel confused, helpless, afraid and angry. Most hospitals have staff—pastoral care professionals, social workers, case managers—to meet the needs of families and loved ones.
- DO** ask to speak with the charge nurse, nurse manager or nurse supervisor if you have a problem with a member of the healthcare team. You can also ask for the hospital's patient advocate or patient representative, whose sole job is to solve problems for patients and their families.
- DON'T** send flowers or plants to someone in a critical care unit. Space around the bedside is limited, and flowers and plants can bring germs and bugs into the unit.