

Guidelines

Professional relationships with patients and families work best when everyone involved understands and respects the nature of these special helping relationships. When professional helping relationships are done well, they effectively reflect the four service standards of Safety, Compassion, Performance and Presentation. The following are guidelines to help employees maintain and establish healthy helping relationships with the patients and families we serve:

Gifts

- Personal gifts from staff are not to be given to patients and families. Teamwork versus individual effort should be stressed rather than individual effort and caring when communicating with patients and families. If your unit routinely celebrates significant milestones (graduations, "end of treatment," birthdays) remember to be consistent in your practices.
- Treat patients and families equally (if you have a special gift to share with families please make sure every patient/family is included).
- Money is not to be given or loaned to patients or families (see resources available below).
- Accept only very modest gifts from patients and families (use a monetary amount as your guide). Once again, stress teamwork rather than individual effort when considering accepting gifts of appreciation from patients or families.
- Inform your manager of any gift received. Even gifts of small monetary value should be evaluated with your manager for frequency and appropriateness.
- Follow Corporate Compliance guidelines regarding gifts from vendors.

Respecting Confidentiality

- Keep patient's information private, even within ACH. Share information with other staff on a professional "need to know" basis and protect information from other patients and families.

- Do not share patient information with family, friends, religious groups, and neighbors.
- In following regulations set forth by HIPAA, if you had a relationship with a family prior to them seeking care at ACH, please keep these boundary guidelines in mind but some of them may not apply in that situation.

Protecting and Promoting Professional Relationships

Help patients and families understand the professional nature of your caring relationship with them. **Avoid any activity that you were not hired to provide, such as:**

- Sharing your personal phone number; use your work numbers if contact is needed for hospital purposes. For inpatients, contact information is located on the discharge summary.
- Sharing your personal email address; use your work email address if contact is needed for hospital purposes.
- Contacting patients/families for non-work purposes.
- Inviting them to or joining them in social activities.
- Inviting them to religious services or activities.
- Babysitting.
- Sharing personal problems or personal information with them that changes the focus of the relationship.
- Providing them transportation in your personal vehicle.
- Sharing secrets.
- Promoting patient/family dependence or reliance on the employee.

- Behaving in a way that could be considered flirtatious which could lead to inappropriate sexual contact or the misperception of sexual interest.
- Forming dual relationships where the employee has a personal or business relationship as well as a professional one.

When attending a patient's funeral or other special event, go with others from the team whenever possible and always make your manager aware of your plans.

Handling Exceptions to Professional Relationship Guidelines

- Before making an exception to the guidelines listed above, discuss the situation with your manager.
- Document any and all exceptions for the protection of the patient and family and your own protection (documentation is directed by each manager).

Resources Available for Patients and Families in Need

- Clothing or toys assistance: contact Child Life & Education, ext. 41412.
- Parent meal assistance, transportation or overnight lodging needs: contact Family Services, ext. 41247.
- Spiritual needs: contact Pastoral Care, ext. 41824.
- Concerning situations, additional emotional support, or unusual financial needs: contact Social Work, ext. 41406.
- If you know of other resources available to help, please contact unit social worker or call ext. 41406

Appropriate Responses to Boundary Violations by Staff:

- Staff is encouraged to periodically review and identify behaviors that could lead to potential boundary violations.
- Co-workers are encouraged to support each other, be consistent in their interactions with patients and families and provide honest feedback and guidance when a co-worker is observed crossing a boundary that could be harmful to the employee or patient/family.
- Notify your manager when you observe a boundary violation that could put the patient or employee at risk.

Appropriate Responses to Boundary Violations by Families:

- When a family requests your home number to "keep in touch" after discharge, refer them to the discharge instruction sheet which should have contact numbers listed.
- When a family confides in you that you are the only one they can trust or turn to, encourage them to build trust with other staff, or have the manager or Pt. Family Rep meet with the family to promote healthy communication or relationships with other team members.
- When a family requests you keep their personal numbers for use outside of work, remind them that you are glad you have a good relationship with them but that there are others at ACH who also may keep in touch by using the numbers in the computer during normal work hours.
- When a family says they must do something to repay your kindness, you may want to suggest that a positive response on the Patient Satisfaction survey is always appreciated.

Exceptions and References:

Any exceptions to these Guidelines should be discussed with your manager. For additional information and discussion on the subject of boundaries please call the Social Work Department or review:

"Professional Boundaries: A nurse's guide to the importance of appropriate professional boundaries"; National Council of State Boards of Nursing, Inc., 1996. www.ncsbn.org

National Association of Social Workers (NASW); "Code of Ethics", revised 1999. <http://www.naswdc.org/pubs/code/code.asp>

Council of Nephrology Social Workers

Association of Pediatric Oncology Social Workers

Child Life Council Code of Ethical Responsibility

National Kidney Foundation

Pediatric Chaplains Network Code of Ethics



Professional Relationships with Patients and Families



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