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NYPIRG Releases Report Detailing Visitor Policies at 40 Hospitals Across New York State

Report finds that, while improvements have been made, there is still work to be done to empower patients, their families and loved ones

NYPIRG and New Yorkers for Patient and Family Empowerment Issue Fourth Edition of Sick, Scared & Separated From Loved Ones Report

(New York) No hospital patient should feel scared or alone on top of being sick. Advocates for patient- and family-centered care have urged that a culture change needs to take place regarding how hospitals view a patient's support network of family, companions and friends. Instead of placing arbitrary limits on when they can be present at a patient's bedside, hospitals should welcome and encourage family caregiver or care partner participation in the patient's care, consistent with the patient's wishes.

On Thursday, NYPIRG revealed the findings of a two-year survey of visitation policies at 40 hospitals across New York State, finding that while improvements continue to be made, there is still work to be done to empower patients, their families and loved ones.

"Hospital patients have a better and safer experience with loved ones at their side. Our report shows that when administrators learn how other institutions have opened up hospital rooms to loved ones, they can provide both high quality and patient-friendly care," said Blair Horner, NYPIRG Executive Director.

Sick, Scared & Separated From Loved Ones evaluates the policies on family caregiver or care partner presence and visiting hours, as well as hospital website communications, over time. The report also measures the impact that participation in the Institute for Patient- and Family-Centered Care (IPFCC)'s **Better Together Learning Community** made. In 2014, IPFCC launched an international campaign, Better Together: Partnering with Families, to provide training programs to help hospitals reexamine and improve their practices.

Key findings include:

- **Good News:**
 - More than two thirds (27) of the hospitals surveyed were found to provide 12 or more hours of visiting time per day, with 17 of these hospitals now offering 24-hour "open" visitation for general medical/surgical units.
 - 18 of the hospital websites surveyed had clear statements encouraging the patient to designate a person or persons to serve as family caregivers/care partners. Another three hospitals had statements that strongly implied this.

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- The hospitals that participated in the IPFCC **Better Together Learning Community** tended to perform better as a group with respect to improved policy scores and website communications than those who did not.
- More Work To Be Done:
 - Nearly a fifth of the hospitals (7) had posted policies that significantly restricted patients' access to family and other trusted people.
 - When looking at website communications, the prime source of information for members of the public, none of the hospitals received a perfect score.

"IPFCC was honored to collaborate again with the New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG) and New Yorkers for Patient & Family Empowerment on this important report. We appreciated the opportunity to work with leaders at New York hospitals and to support them in various ways to implement our Better Together campaign - highlighting family presence and participation as an organizational priority and a crucial safety strategy for patients," shared Beverley H. Johnson, President & CEO, IPFCC and Deborah L. Dokken, Coordinator, Patient and Family Partnerships, IPFCC.

For over two decades, research has identified substantial benefits that occur when hospitals maximize patients' access to their personal support system of family and friends, instead of instituting restrictive or arbitrary visitor policies.

A study in 2013-2014 by the Health Research & Educational Trust found that hospitals that allowed unrestricted access to patients by family and care partners had higher patient satisfaction ratings. Additionally, a 2016 study of the transition to a less restrictive policy on family caregiver/care partner presence in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) found that patient satisfaction increased while nurses did not report any increase in interference with medical care.

"No one should be alone in the hospital," said Suzanne Mattei, project director of New Yorkers for Patient & Family Empowerment. "The most important step a patient can take for safety is to choose a trusted family member or friend to be in the room, paying attention and asking questions as needed. This report shows which hospitals welcome such support persons and include them as partners in care."

Recommendations include that hospitals: adopt a 24-hour visitation policy; encourage patients to designate a family caregiver/care partner; consider family caregiver/care partners as partners in care not simply well-wishing visitors; and, develop website communications that consistently and transparently support a patient's right to have their chosen family caregiver/care partners present throughout their stay.

For the purposes of the report, the term "family caregiver" or "care partner" is used to describe individuals, whether related to the patient or not, who have been identified by the patient as support persons whom the hospital should consider to be partners in care for the patient.

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