Communication When Family Members or Other Visitors Are Present

It is important to always ask a patient if he/she wants others present during discussions that involve treatment, medical care or when discussing patient protected health information (PHI). We should not assume a patient wants to have visitors/family members present during patient-provider communications.

1. Be specific with the patient when family or visitors are present. Say “I’d like to discuss your treatment plan or laboratory results, etc. with you. Is it ok for me to discuss this with you in front of your guests?”
2. If Highly Confidential Information (mental health, genetic testing, HIV/AIDS, communicable disease, etc.) will be discussed, ask the visitor(s) to step outside the room or away from the area where the conversation will take place.
3. If the patient has given permission, you may continue the discussion and should document in the patient’s medical record that the patient gave permission for a visitor to be present.
4. If the patient does not want family members or visitors present, ask the individual(s) to step out of the room or away from the area prior to beginning the discussion and then invite them back when the discussion is over.

Any questions/comments/concerns please feel free to reach out to the Privacy Program at:

773-834-9716 or hpo@bsd.uchicago.edu