

Hospital Visitation

We're all aware that the N.T. writers used the word translated as "visit" in a very different way than the English word is used today. They referred to the proactive meeting of the needs of the sick. Today we think in terms of more or less just going to see them. Though there can be no dispute concerning the Christian's responsibility to meet the physical needs of the sick, there is also a place for the modern concept of visitation.

When one of our brethren is in the hospital, all those with a heart for Christ feel a desire to demonstrate loving concern to the sick brother so we go to visit him in the hospital. As admirable as our motivation maybe, the end result of our visit to the hospital may not accomplish the desired goal. With absolutely no malicious intent our visit may even be an imposition upon the one being visited. Thus, I would like to offer a few guidelines that I have picked up during training sessions at various hospitals.

1)- Make sure you are healthy before you go to visit someone in the hospital. There are a lot of sick people in hospitals. One can catch anything there. Sanitize your hands before going in to the hospital and immediately after leaving. Touch as few surfaces as possible and never touch your face. Above all, make sure that you don't take any communicable disease in to the one you are visiting. For example, if you have a cold, call instead of going there.

2)- Make sure you know the limitations of the patient. Make sure he will welcome a visit before going. Before entering the room, look at the door to make sure the patient is not in isolation or that visitation is not limited. Never take anything edible into the patient without first clearing it with the nurse on duty at that time. Do this every time because the patient's circumstances and dietary restrictions may change.

3)- Respect the patient's pride, dignity and privacy. Always knock before entering their room if the door is closed and other times are nice as well. If the doctor, nurse or hospital staff comes in to converse with the patient, excuse yourself, at least until they leave. If the patient's food comes or they need to use the restroom, say goodbye and leave.

4)- Always observe visiting hours unless called in by the patient or his family. Visiting hours exist for practical reasons, not just for limiting visitors. The medical personnel try to do as many of their procedures as possible in the morning. Visitors in the room are a disruption when the nurses are preparing for shift change or just starting a shift. Visiting hours give the patient hours of semi-privacy and rest.

5)- If there are other visitors already there, especially family, go in, greet the patient and leave promptly. Do the same if others come in while you are there. The patient's room is not a place for a social gathering.

6)- Keep your hospital visits very short. Once the patient has seen you and you have expressed your care for him, the purpose of your visit is accomplished. Under no circumstance should a visit be more than 5 minutes unless the patient specifically asks you to stay and talk with him. Half a minute is sufficient for a visit to gravely ill person or just after one comes out of surgery.

7)- The patient should never have to strain or to move to make eye contact with a visitor. The patient's comfort is important; the visitor is just passing through. Stand at the foot of the bed or on the side of the bed where the patient is facing. Under no circumstance position yourself so the patient's modesty is compromised.

8)- Be positive and upbeat, but do not tell jokes that cause a surgical patient or any other patient in pain to laugh. Sincere compliments are fine, but do not be flattering to a patient as it may create fear within them that you know something they don't.

9)- The patient is the center of attention. He doesn't need to hear stories of others who had similar problems to his. If the conversation gets to this point, it's a good sign that you've stayed too long. Let them tell you how they feel and as much as they choose to tell about their situation. Ask them how they feel about their condition. Give encouragement.

10)- Do not ask the patient if he will pray with you, but be ready to pray for with him when asked. Some people are embarrassed to refuse prayer and especially embarrassed to pray in front of others.

11)- Never discuss the patient with others in front of him even if he appears to be asleep or unconscious. He may be listening. If you ask a close family member to walk you out, the patient often interprets this as your desire to discuss bad news that's being kept from him. If the patient hears you talking just outside the door, he may have the same reaction and may place severe interpretations on an occasional word he overhears. Talk with the family in the visitor's lounge, etc.

12)- Be positive, empathetic and uplifting. You are there for a purpose so take care of business. Both as you come in and as you go out express love and caring concern. Be respectful at all times and never lecture or scold the patient for not being careful, obeying the doctor's orders, staying on their diet, etc.

We visit our brethren in the hospital because we love them and we are concerned for their wellbeing. These 12 pointers will help us make sure our visit accomplishes that goal. However, the most important thing is that we go. *"Above all, be fervent in your love one for another."*

Note: It's nice to take someone with you who won't or can't go on their own. In so doing you accomplish 2 visits with one trip.