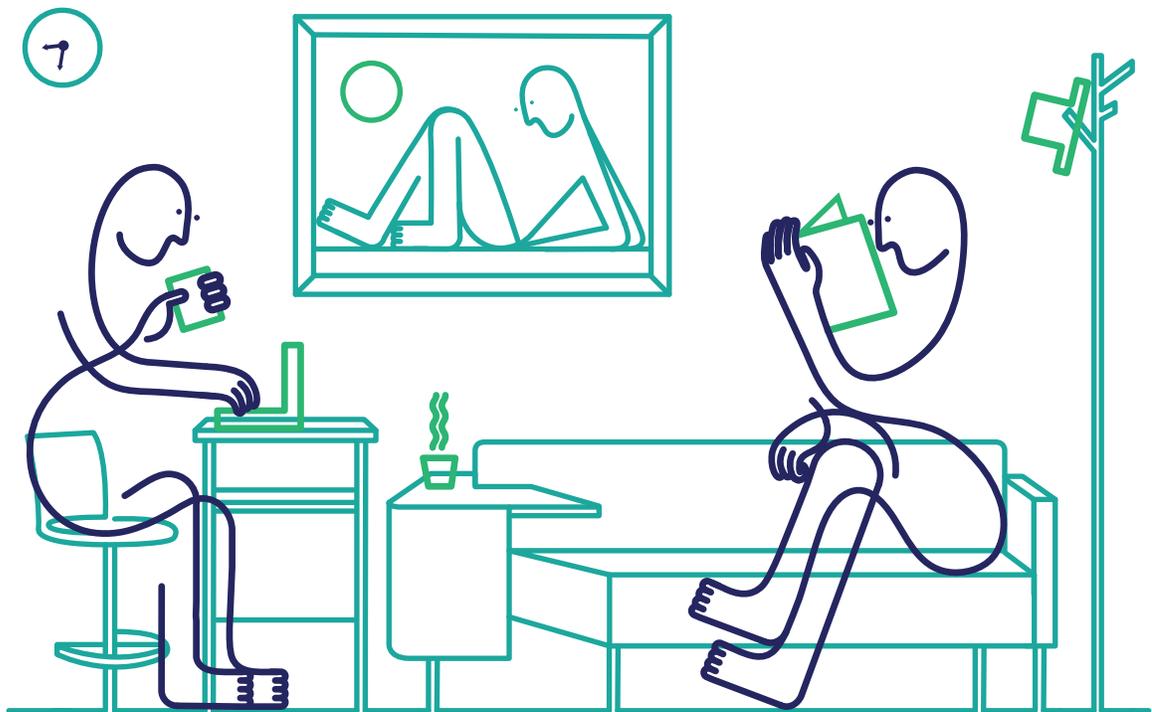


## Making Room for Guests

Safety is just one reason caregivers are welcoming the presence of family members in the patient room



**One of the most important roles a guest can play when visiting a family member in the hospital is enhancing that patient's safety. Numerous studies have also linked the presence of family in the room to less patient anxiety, less chance of medical errors, better treatment adherence, improved physical and mental health, and even lower mortality rates.**

Making room for guests, however, particularly in older, double-occupancy rooms, has added a new wrinkle to the work of hospital staff and caregivers. A Midwestern nurse manager (whose name is omitted for patient privacy) describes it this way: "If each patient has someone visiting, it's very crowded." While many of her facility's rooms are small, the hospital also offers a large family suite, where she says caregivers enjoy working. "When nursing enters the room, there's an area that's designated for them so they don't have to worry that patient stuff or family stuff has encroached on that space. I find that room much more convenient. It's really helpful for both them and the nurses."

“If the patient is happy and the family is happy, satisfaction will be higher.”

– Nurse Manager

Her employer has developed an open-ended visitor policy after recognizing the benefits of including family members in the healing process. “Having a family member in the room is one more level of safety, one more person hearing what needs to be done and able to respond,” she said. Family members can also input details that caregivers may not ask or the patient may not know. She added: “While we try to understand their family member, we don’t know them as well as their own families do. If there’s a change in their neuro-status that is subtle, we may not notice it. But if the family is there, they know that person and can notice when they’re behaving unusually and articulate for us what’s different.”

Of course, one of reasons hospitals are welcoming guests is simply that it makes the patient feel better—a top goal of any healthcare organization. “If the patient is happy and the family is happy, satisfaction will be higher,” the nurse manager said. “That’s beneficial to the hospital in many ways—especially now that the Affordable Care Act is basing reimbursement on HCAHPS scores.” The acronym stands for Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems. The publicly recorded scores that are part of HCAHPS are derived from a standardized survey developed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to help quantify patient satisfaction. Since July 2007, hospitals must collect and submit the data to receive their full annual payment update from the government. Once the scores are recorded, the public can compare them to see which hospitals leave patients most satisfied.

While that satisfaction depends on many things, studies show that it’s enhanced when family or friends are there to offer comfort at any hour the patient may need it. As the understanding of the guest’s role in healing expands, the way healthcare organizations welcome them into the patient room will continue to evolve, from 24-hour visitor policies to designated family zones to accommodating guest furnishings such as the [Palisade Collection](#). It’s a clear recognition that in today’s healthcare, family is good medicine.