



ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Geriatric Nursing

journal homepage: www.gnjournal.com

AALNA section

Preserving Family Presence During a Pandemic

Susan Frampton, PhD, FPCC

The Coalition to Preserve Family Presence has created new recommendations for family presence in hospitals, long-term care communities and other care settings during the COVID-19 outbreak were released on May 28, 2020. The guidelines were developed by an international "pop-up coalition" of more than 60 leading organizations and voices in the field. The recommendations advocate for a compassionate approach to visitation that balances the benefits of family's physical presence with a loved one and the need to minimize the risks of transmission of COVID-19. The recommendations are available at <https://bit.ly/familypresence> to provide guidance to healthcare leaders and local and regional authorities on what constitutes responsible, compassionate family presence during – and in the aftermath of – any pandemic.

The Coalition to Preserve Family Presence included patient, resident, family and elder advocates, experts in quality, safety and infection control, clinicians, policy makers and leading voices in person-centered care from organizations across the globe. The Coalition's work was facilitated by Planetree International and The Pioneer Network, and contributors included the World Health Organization, Institute for Healthcare Improvement, American Assisted Living Nurses Association, American Nurses Association, Eden Alternative, American College of Healthcare Administrators, American Healthcare Association, National Center for Assisted Living, and many more. Members convened in mid-May for a rapid response to the unintended consequences the country is experiencing due to widespread restrictions being placed on family presence that have emerged since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. In some cases, these restrictions have prevented the most vulnerable from having a familiar support person by their side during, including at the end-of-life.

The coalition represented a wide range of perspectives in an effort to develop recommendations that represent reasonable approaches for maintaining both safety and a person-centered approach to family presence. Including advocates for elders and their families was particularly important since many policy changes have been made without consulting the people most impacted by those changes.

The recommendations emphasize the importance of considering not only the risk that family presence may pose to the staff, patients, residents and loved ones, but also the risk that restrictions may create

for the physical, emotional and psychological health of these same individuals.

The Coalition established eight critical guidelines to preserve family presence in pandemics and other challenging times:

1. Assess whether there is a need for restrictions to family presence based on current factual evidence. Continually reassess and adjust policies as conditions evolve.
2. Minimize risk of physical presence by following appropriate infection control guidelines issued by the World Health Organization (WHO) and local and regional health authorities.
3. Communicate what to expect proactively and with compassion so families do not appear at a location unaware of restrictions that have been put into place.
4. Establish and clearly state compassionate exceptions to family presence restrictions, for example in end-of-life situations.
5. Support meaningful connections to minimize isolation in cases where family is unable to be physically present, using virtual or other means.
6. Inform and educate in cases where family can be with their loved one physically, adopting a shared decision-making approach to communicate the risks and benefits.
7. Enlist family as partners for quality and safety, engaging them as members of the care team who share in the responsibility for abiding by established safety protocols.
8. Enhance discharge education and post-discharge follow-up to support successful transitions of care, especially when family have not been present during a hospitalization.

The Guidelines support safe, compassionate family presence policies and practice within communities during challenging circumstances, starting with distinguishing between casual visitation and the essential role that family play as members of the individual's social and emotional support system. Communities are encouraged to vet their current policies against the recommendations in order to promote true partnership with long-term care residents and families in balancing the risks and benefits of family presence.

Susan Frampton, Ph. D, FPCC
President
Planetree International

E-mail address: sframpton@planetree.org