

Open Family Presence Policy May 11, 2016

- A provincial open family presence policy was approved in August 2015. The policy calls for all Saskatchewan health regions to move away from the practice of restricting visiting hours, to instead welcome families 24 hours a day, seven days a week, according to the patient's preference.
- All health regions are at different stages of implementing the policy. Sunrise Health Region adopted an open family presence policy in 2014, while other regions are just beginning to educate staff and establish procedures to support the new policy.
- Each health region will have a procedure to help patients identify family members in this context and when they would like to have family present. Guests of the family are encouraged to ask the patient and/or family if and when it's appropriate to visit.
- A patient and family's experience with open family presence may vary over the next several months as regions seek to implement this policy in full.

Questions and Answers

Q1. How long has Saskatchewan supported an open family presence policy?

A1. The Saskatchewan health system has been committed to patient- and family-centred care since the release of the Patient First Review in 2009. Central to this approach is recognizing the important role that families play in the health and well-being of the patient during hospitalization.

A provincial open family presence policy was approved in August 2015, calling for all health regions to implement a policy to welcome families in their facilities 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Each region adopted this policy as of March 31, 2016, and implementation is currently underway.

Q2. What is the goal of the open family presence policy?

- A2. The goal is to recognize families are partners in the patient's care, and ensure patients are welcome to have their loved ones with them to the degree that they wish, rather than restricted to specific visiting hours. Patients may define their family differently; therefore 'family' refers to a group of individuals with a continuing legal, genetic, and/or emotional relationship.

Q3. What is the status of the policy and regional implementation?

- A3. Sunrise Health Region adopted an open family presence policy in 2014. The remaining health regions had committed to adopting an open family presence policy by March 31, 2016 and are now working towards implementation.

The provincial policy enables each region to create procedures that take into consideration their unique facilities and circumstances. Implementation may also include educating staff and updating public signage.

Q4. Will there be any limitations?

- A4. *The policy is based on respect and dignity. We ask for the cooperation of all patients, families, and their guests to maintain a clean, quiet, and healing environment.*

Family and guests may be limited in the following ways:

- The number of people welcomed at the bedside at any one time will be determined in collaboration with the patient, family and health care team. In situations where there are shared rooms, this discussion will also include the other patients and their families. To ensure safety, consideration will also be given to the physical limitations of the space.
- There may be interruptions to family presence, including to protect the privacy rights of other patients or to maintain safety and security.
- Children (younger than 14 years) are welcome if supervised by an adult who is not the patient.
- Family members and guests who are feeling unwell; have an infection; have symptoms of respiratory illness or flu-like illnesses should not come to a health care facility.
- Limitations may also be in effect due to extenuating circumstances such as outbreaks and during service disruptions.

Q5. Is Saskatchewan’s policy similar to other jurisdictions?

- A5. The policy was drafted based on policies already implemented at Kingston General Hospital in Ontario, and Sunrise Health Region in Saskatchewan. Sunrise implemented the policy in September 2014. In 2015, an audit was done to assess whether staff knew about the policy and how it was experienced by patients and families.

The audit found:

- 96% of staff surveyed knew about the open visiting hours policy;
- 96% of staff surveyed felt the policy was implemented consistently in their facility;
- 100% of patients surveyed reported that they were able to have their family with them to the degree they felt comfortable;
- Similar audits will be done in all regions to confirm that patients experience open family presence, and that any challenges identified are resolved and managed.

Q6. Why was the policy created?

- A6. The Institute for Patient- and Family-Centered Care has established an international campaign to change policies and the culture of visiting hours in 1,000 hospitals by 2017. This shift – from viewing family members as *visitors* – to focusing on the belief that we are *Better Together* when we recognize patients and families as *partners* in care.

“Isolating patients at their most vulnerable time from the people who know them best places them at risk for medical error, emotional harm, inconsistencies in care, lack of preparedness for the transitions of care, and unnecessary costs. Yet in many hospitals and health systems, outdated visiting policies still separate families and other loved ones during hospital stays.

Changing these policies is the first step toward creating a patient- and family-centered culture where families are recognized as essential to patients’ health and well-being, and where they are respected as allies for quality and safety.” (Institute for Patient- and Family-Centered Care, *Better Together* campaign, ipfcc.org)

In Canada, the Canadian Foundation for Healthcare Improvement has committed to challenging and supporting Canadian hospitals to adopt *Better Together* open family presence policies. (www.cfhi-fcass.ca)

Q7: How does Saskatchewan's policy align with the *Better Together* campaign?

- A7. The Institute for Patient- and Family-Centered Care has established an international campaign called *Better Together* to change policies and the culture of visiting hours in 1,000 hospitals by 2017. In Canada, the Canadian Foundation for Healthcare Improvement has committed to challenging and supporting health care facilities to adopt *Better Together* policies.

In September, the Health Quality Council of Saskatchewan became a supporting organization of the Canadian Foundation for Healthcare Improvement's *Better Together* campaign. Saskatchewan's approach and commitment to open family presence aligns with the campaign.

Saskatchewan is the first Canadian province to take a provincial approach to an open family presence policy.

Q8. Who participated in the creation of the provincial policy?

- A8. The provincial patient- and family-centred care Guiding Coalition created the policy. The Guiding Coalition includes patient and family advisors, staff representatives from the 13 health regions, the Health Quality Council, the Ministry of Health and its partner agencies (3sHealth, eHealth and the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency).

Patient and family advisors who work with the provincial Guiding Coalition felt strongly that one provincial policy was needed to ensure that families did not have different levels of access to their loved ones depending on the health region in which the patient accessed care.