

What Can I Do in a Healthcare Setting?

Here are some suggestions of what you can do if a family member or close friend is in the hospital, especially for an extended stay.

Check if you can bring artwork, family photos, sacred objects, plants, stuffed animals, or other objects to the hospital room (and if so, ask the patient what they would like).

Bring the patient's favorite music, as well as music he or she finds relaxing.

If there is a VCR/DVD player in the room, bring a variety of videos to distract the patient. See also if you can also find videos specifically designed for relaxation, some with photos of nature and soothing music. (Many hospitals offer these, either on the TV system or to check out.)

Ask if pets can visit (perhaps in an outdoor area if not in the room).

Find out if there is a garden on the grounds and go there as often as you can, taking the patient when they are able.

If it is nice outside, find out if you can open the windows in the room.

Find out if the hospital has other facilities: exercise room, playrooms for children, entertainment options.

Eliminate Environmental Stressors

Consider supplying pleasant smells to the patient to reduce negative smells (disinfectant) that might contribute to anxiety and stress. See http://takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/therapies/aromatherapy/what_is_aromatherapy for some suggestions of essential oils you could put on a cotton ball near the patient to not only block negative smells, but offer healing properties. For example, lavender can help some people sleep better.

Bring ear plugs, white noise machine, or a small fan to block out noise.

If the lighting is unpleasant, see if you can adjust it, or if there are any other portable options.

Work with the Staff

Ask for the daily schedule, so family support members can leave to take a break without missing important events.

Insist on careful, professional care, but be kind and respectful to staff.
Be involved in establishing the plan of care and check that the plan is carried out.

For more information on how you can be an advocate for a patient, see
http://takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/healthcare_system.

Seek Out Complementary Therapies

Ask if complementary therapies are available, either from a staff specialist or a trained nurse on duty. Examples found at some hospitals are: massage, healing touch, Reiki, aromatherapy, music therapy, acupuncture. Visit <http://takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/therapies> for more information.

Optimize Nutrition for All

Find out what food options are available at the hospital. Are there alternative menu options?
Are the meal times flexible?

Find out where the family can eat on campus and if there are any food storage options.

Maintain a Loving Presence

Make sure you take care of yourself so you can be a calm, loving presence. Get breaks when you need them, and practice your favorite stress reduction technique. (Visit <http://takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/therapies/mind-body/what> for some ideas and several guided meditation exercises that you can do.)

Realize that optimism, hardiness, self-efficacy, and a sense of control are linked to good health and that they can be learned and practiced. Resolve to do so and to help the patient do the same.

Be thoughtful and intentional in your interactions with the patient, visitors, and staff to help create a loving, healing space.