

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### Designated Support Persons

The general restrictions placed on visits due to COVID-19 have significantly limited the support that loved ones can provide to patients. It has been shown that, when in place for an extended period of time, these restrictions have a negative impact on the mental and physical health of patients.

Some patients need support during their hospital stay and it is important for their wellness to have a loved one by their side. Therefore, the Network is allowing the presence of designated support persons, in all phases of the pandemic, so that these patients can obtain the support they need.

#### What is a designated support person?

A designated support person

- is a person designated by the patient or their substitute decision maker and whose presence is deemed important to the patient's safety and well-being during their hospital stay.
- may be a family member, friend, loved one or caregiver.
- must be 18 years of age or older.
- provides physical, psychological and emotional support, as the patient deems important. For example, the designated support person may help the patient understand their treatment options and make decisions, communicate, eat, move and wash.
- is considered an essential member of the health care team who helps ensure patient safety and quality care.

#### What is the difference between a designated support person and a visitor?

Compared to general visitors, **the designated support person** plays an important support role with the patient. Their presence is essential to the patient's safety and well-being.

**Visitors** play an important social role, but they do not participate in the care as active partners. Visitors are only permitted to visit during the Yellow Phase and during specific visiting hours.

#### Can all patients have a designated support person?

**No.** A designated support person is recommended for the patient groups below at all pandemic alert levels.

- Palliative/end-of-life care (this includes patients at the end of life who are hospitalized in a unit other than the Palliative Care Unit)
- Medical assistance in dying
- Intensive/critical care (this includes patients in critical condition, whose life is in danger, who are hospitalized in a unit other than the Intensive/Critical Care Unit)
- Pediatrics/Pediatric Psychiatry/Neonatology
- Obstetrics (Labour and Delivery, Postpartum)
- Patients who have been in hospital for 14 days or longer
- Patients with intellectual/communication impairments (for ex.: cognitive impairment leading to agitation and inability to console, communication impairment which affects care)

### Can a designated support person be present at all times?

- The presence of the designated support person is not limited to the visiting hours applicable to general/social visits.
- The hours and frequency of visits, as well as the support that the designated support person will provide to the patient will be determined in collaboration with the patient, the designated support person and members of the health care team.

### How many designated support persons can be present?

An eligible patient or their substitute decision maker may designate up to two designated support persons.

Exceptions to the number of designated support persons are indicated in the [quick reference guide](#). A patient can have only ONE person at their bedside, either a designated support person or a general visitor (when visits are allowed in the yellow phase).

Patients may change their designated support person(s) if the individual is unable to meet the expectations of the patient / unit.

### What guidelines must a designated support person follow?

#### A designated support person must do as follows:

- Perform a self-assessment at home before each visit and not visit the patient if they have symptoms or risk factors (travel, contact with a positive case, etc.);
- Wear a medical mask properly at all times (ensure that the mask always covers the nose and mouth);
- Wash their hands when entering and leaving the facility as well as when entering and leaving the patient's room;
- Maintain a physical distance of two metres (six feet) from other patients, staff and visitors. As an active member of the healthcare team, they are not required to maintain a two-meter distance from the patient.
- Go directly to the patient's room and remain there for the entire visit;
- Leave the room when staff must perform a procedure and at any time when the care team deems it necessary;
- Check with the nursing staff about wearing PPE if the patient is in isolation;
- Limit close contacts with other people in the community as much as possible, to reduce the risk of being exposed to COVID-19;
- Follow the Public Health guidelines (wear a mask in the community, respect physical distancing, etc.)
- Advise the Infection Prevention and Control Department if they test positive for COVID-19 within two weeks of their presence in the hospital.

#### Designated support persons are prohibited from the following:

- Entering the facility if they have symptoms of COVID-19 or any other acute infection, such as the flu, a cold, etc.;
- Using the patient's washroom (they must use the visitors' washroom);
- Using shared spaces (TV lounges, kitchenettes, etc.). Some exceptions may be made for a designated support person who is present for extended periods of time (e.g. in Pediatrics, Palliative Care).

A [guide](#) has been developed for the designated support persons; this guide must be given to designated support persons before their visit or on their first visit. The guide is also available on the Network's website.

**Staff have an important role to play in ensuring that designated support persons are aware of and follow the guidelines and that they wear the mask and personal protective equipment properly.**

A designated support person who does not follow the guidelines or who displays disruptive behaviour may be asked to leave the facility or lose their designation as a support person.

### What is the procedure for integrating designated support persons?

- Upon admission or when developing/revising the care plan, the nursing staff must assess whether the patient belongs to one of the patient groups that can have a designated support person (see above).
- If the patient belongs to one of the eligible patient groups,
  - a. ask the patient or their substitute decision maker to identify two people as designated support persons.
  - b. document the names and contact information of the two people in the patient's chart (in the Kardex)
- The nursing staff or the patient must communicate with each person to advise them that they have been designated as support person. They must be informed of their role as DSP and of the visitation plan. The visitation plan will be documented in the chart.
- The nursing staff must inform the patient and each designated support person of the restrictions in place due to COVID-19.
  - a. The designated support person must perform a self-assessment at home before each visit and will not be authorized to visit the patient in any of the following circumstances:
    - They have symptoms of COVID-19;
    - They have received confirmation of a positive COVID-19 test;
    - They have travelled outside the province within the past 14 days;
    - They have had contact with a confirmed case within the past 14 days;
    - They have been in close contact with a person with an acute respiratory illness;
    - They have stayed under the same roof as someone in self-isolation;
    - They are waiting for a COVID-19 test result.
- The nursing staff asks the designated support person to read the information found on the Network's website and provides them with the [information guide](#) on their first visit.
- Upon arrival at the facility, the person indicates that they are a designated support person. They must go through the pre-screening at the main entrance and meet the requirements.
- Once on the unit, the person informs the staff that they are a designated support person and that they will visit the patient. They discuss the support to provide to the patient with the care team as needed.
- When the designated support person leaves the care unit, they let the staff know that they are leaving and provide them with any additional information about the patient's condition, their concerns, their questions, etc.
- The nursing staff provides the designated support person with directives on the proper use of personal protective equipment (PPE), hand hygiene practices and restrictions/guidelines (see above).