

PASTORAL MINISTRY

Hospital Visitation

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It is important for shepherds to know their sheep. Jesus, our Master and ultimate example, said, "I am the Good Shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me." Visitation demonstrates that we are Shepherds, that we are aware, that people are valuable, that we care about them. Effectively done, this is an unfailing tool in ministry Christ to people who are hurting. It involves a spiritual person, the Spirit of God and the Word of God.

WHEN TO VISIT

Honor all requests for NO visitors. This means you!

Restrict your visits to visiting hours, unless given specific permission by the nursing staff and patient.

Avoid mornings as this is a very busy time for the patient. Breakfast, getting presentable, x-rays, testing and therapy keep the patient busy.

It may be helpful to pre-warn the patient you are coming or ask permission from a close relative to visit.

Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays are lonelier days for the patient, as people don't visit as much then. So visit on these days if possible.

ETIQUETTE

Do's

Be cheerful, optimistic.

ASK how many visitors have been in today already. If you are number 18, stay only 5 minutes AT MOST!

Make the visit brief unless invited to stay longer (particularly if the patient wants to talk.) 10-15 minutes may be enough. Be sensitive to how the patient feels. Long visits can be harmful, exhausting and almost unbearable to someone who is ill. But, don't appear to be rushed either.

Talk about newsy items, happenings at the church, etc. Bring them a magazine to read. Funny cards may be helpful in an otherwise "dismal" situation.

Be ready to perform any service that is consistent with propriety and with hospital rules (e.g. writing a letter, making a call, running an errand, etc.)

Stand in a place that is easy for the patient to see you. Also, be close enough so to making talking and listening easier.

Don'ts

Don't sit on the bed or do anything that might disturb/upset the patient.

Don't bring up *your* troubles or trials. And try to avoid talking about "Aunt Tizzy who had a similar ailment..." or "Uncle George who died from that ..." This usually does nothing for the patient.

Don't be negative (i.e. about the patient's appearance, nursing staff, doctors, etc.)

Never break a confidence. If his/her condition is sensitive or something they are embarrassed about, ask how specific you should be when sharing this prayer concern with others.

It is known that sometimes people who are in a coma can hear and understand what is being said, even if they cannot communicate. Be careful what you say.

SPIRITUAL

Scriptural

Ask if anyone has read the Scripture or prayed with them today. If not, offer to do so with them. Always ask permission.

Our counsel may fail. But, God's Word turns the patient to the Lord.

Select an appropriate passage ahead of time or read one the patient requests. Best to keep it short. Please, no preaching.

Develop a list of appropriate scripture references in the back of your Bible (on the blank pages). Some bible contain a list of verses for people suffering. This would be a good start, but develop your own personalized list that you feel comfortable using.

Passages having to do with the character of God are especially good.

Also, the Psalms contain much reflection on suffering, depression, and various other issues that relate to people in the hospital.

Praying

When praying, it often adds a special dimension of comfort and warmth to hold the patient's hand or to "lay hands upon him/her." Exercise caution when doing this so that the touching is not "inappropriate".

But, don't be afraid of touching.

Pray for God's strength, encouragement and cheer.

If God has given you a strong burden or sense of faith, pray for healing.

Be careful of "claiming" God's healing. We have no such "claims" on God. But, we have a God who hears our prayers and may be pleased to heal.

God's healing may be miraculous or through medical treatment. Or his answer may be to strengthen the patient through suffering.

While you are praying for the patient you came to visit, you might include a prayer for the other patient(s) in the room. Often, they will hear you and thank you afterwards. This may lead to further opportunity to be used of God.

PERSONAL PREPARATION

Be clean and make sure you don't have bad breath!

Be neat, but casual.

Bring a small bible, not a huge one. You don't want to draw attention to yourself or to inadvertently make a big, yet comfortable show for the patient.

If you are visiting as a representative of the church, check about getting "credentials" with the hospital which will give you "free" parking and some special visiting privileges.

Do not visit if you have a cold or other contagious illness.

GENERAL

Your goal is to help the patient look to God for comfort and answers. Don't preach a sermon or try to give all the answers to shy God allows suffering. Sometimes, the best answer is "I don't know." Sometimes the answer they need is that God cares for them through you.

Avoid anything that implies their situation is a result of sin. If it is, they know it. If not, they don't need a guilt trip.

There is much pressure on Christians to present a "good show" when experiencing illness or injury. Inwardly there often is uncertainty, fear, anxiety and apprehension. Avoid common exclamations such as: "I came to encourage you, but you have encouraged me.." or "You are handling this so well ...". Often, this doesn't really help. In fact, sometimes it may just discourage them from really facing their fears.

Be careful of *so* stressing faith for healing that you undermine the patient's faith if God chooses not to heal him/her.

If the patient is a Christian, you might bring a tape of Sunday's message, music, tapes, pamphlets, etc. But, be sensitive. They may have already received 10 "special" books to read. Often, the best thing to do is simply listen, read a short portion for Scripture which talks about trusting God, and then pray.