

Information to help pastors and other church workers have the most effective pastoral visits in a nursing home or hospital

1. People in nursing homes are residents, not patients. That is their home. Some people may be offended when you call them patients.
2. **Wash your hands** or use the hand cleanser provided when you enter & leave a unit and as you go from room to room. Don't give free rides to germs and viruses.
3. If you have a cold or flu or are sneezing or coughing due to allergies, wear a mask. The staff are normally glad to provide one for you.
4. It is helpful to staff if you tell them who you plan to visit on their unit. This way they can more easily accommodate you and try to avoid interruptions. The staff can also inform you regarding precautions such as wearing a mask, gown, or gloves. Personally, I prefer to make hospital visits after 5PM when there are fewer tests and procedures. It can be helpful to consult with nursing home staff on your first visit to get a general idea of a resident's schedule and what the best time is for a visit.
5. Don't be offended if the staff won't tell you much about a person's health condition or family situation. By law they are not allowed to give you this type of information without the resident's or family's written consent or witnessed verbal consent.
6. Always knock before entering a nursing home room. Check with the staff before entering a hospital room when the door is closed.
7. Honor confidentiality. But notify the medical staff if you observe anything that concerns you regarding the person's medical condition or safety.
8. It is a good idea to check with a staff person before offering Holy Communion. The person may have health or swallowing issues. Patients cannot ordinarily take in food or liquid before surgeries and some procedures. You might check with nursing home staff the first time you give Holy Communion and periodically after that, as their condition may change.
9. Some people are on restricted diets or need thickened liquids. Therefore, do not give them anything to eat or drink other than Holy Communion without first checking with the staff.
10. Do not clean up spilled liquids in a resident's or patient's room. Report it to a staff person. It may not be just water! Report it even if it is water or a drink. The staff may be monitoring the person's fluid intake.
11. If your member is in a semi-private room, do not sit on the other bed, even if no one is using it. A staff person may be able to find a chair for you. If the person you are visiting invites you to sit on their bed, it is a good idea to sit only on the blankets and not on the sheets.
12. If a resident's room is lacking privacy, staff may be able to find a more private or quiet place where you can minister to the resident.
13. Don't save the prayer until the end of the visit. Prayer should be at the heart of the visit and may serve as a springboard to further meaningful conversation.
14. Be aware of boundaries. Make sure the person is OK with you touching them. Inform the medical staff immediately if the person accidentally or intentionally exposes private parts of their body to you.
15. If you want to take a nursing home resident out of their unit, first check with a staff person.
16. If a person falls, do not attempt to move them or pick them up. Contact a staff person immediately.
17. Church information or devotional materials placed in restrooms, hallways, meeting rooms, or places where people gather will likely be thrown away. Staff may see this as a form of proselytizing or soliciting, which is normally forbidden.
18. If the facility has a chaplain, it may be beneficial to touch bases with that person regarding your member's religious affiliation. Well trained professional chaplains will ordinarily strive to ensure that your members' spiritual and religious needs are met in accordance with LCMS doctrine and your personal wishes.

Rev. Jeff Harter, Central Illinois District Human Care Committee 8/26/2019. Jeff Harter has served as LCMS parish pastor since 1983. He has been Board Certified with the Association of Professional Chaplains since 2001. He has served as part-time hospital, hospice, or nursing home chaplain since 1994 while serving parishes in ND, MN So., and SELC districts. He now serves as full time chaplain at Concordia Village in Springfield, IL.