



Joint Statement on Preserving Family Presence During Pandemics

The Global Healthcare Accreditation (GHA) Program for Medical Travel Services supports Planetree International's *"Guidelines for minimizing unintended consequences of restrictive family presence policies during a pandemic."*

Healthcare teams around the globe are working tirelessly to provide optimal quality care for patients while also seeking to limit exposure to the COVID-19 virus, and support the emotional and psychological needs of their patients. In an effort to mitigate any unintended consequences brought about by visitation restrictions, Planetree developed a comprehensive set of guidelines to preserve family presence at the time of a pandemic. (Note: The term "family" refers to any support person defined by the patient or resident as family, including friends, neighbors and/or relatives). One of GHA's primary objectives is to improve the patient experience and excellence of care received by patients who travel for their medical care and treatment, whether within their own country or internationally. Obviously, traveling to a foreign country or across a country is more complex than receiving care in one's local community due to travel logistics and potential language and cultural barriers. Medical travel patients are usually accompanied by a family member or friend to assist in navigating the travel, language and cultural experiences involved.

Planetree International and GHA support the engagement of patients and their families in decisions about their own care as a foundation of a high quality, person-centered healthcare system. We believe that patients and families should be involved in the risk-benefit assessment and decisions around family presence, especially in a pandemic. The safety and rights of all groups, including healthcare workers, must be taken into consideration in an ethically sound manner. When one group makes determinations without including the patients and families who will be impacted most, it undermines person-centered care principles.

Safe family presence can be practiced, incorporating well-planned and pro-active approaches and safety protocols during the COVID-19 outbreak. Establishing clear, safe and humane approaches now will help us as we face future challenges. To assist care facilities to establish effective and compassionate policies, the following Guidelines for Preserving Family Presence are encouraged (use this link to access a full set of the visitation guidelines: bit.ly/familypresence).

8 Guidelines to Preserve Family Presence in Pandemics and Other Challenging Times

1. Assess the need for restrictions to family presence based on current factual evidence. Continually reassess and adjust policies as conditions evolve.

2. Minimize risk of physical presence by following appropriate infection control guidelines issued by the WHO and local and regional health authorities.
3. Communicate what to expect proactively and with compassion so families do not appear at a facility unaware of restrictions that have been put into place.
4. Establish and clearly state compassionate exceptions to family presence restrictions, for example in end-of-life situations.
5. Support meaningful connections using virtual or other means to minimize isolation in cases where family is unable to be physically present.
6. Inform and educate in cases where family can be with their loved one physically, adopting a shared decision-making approach to communicate the risks and benefits.
7. Enlist family as partners for quality and safety, engaging them as members of the care team who share in the responsibility for abiding by established safety protocols.
8. Enhance discharge education and post-discharge follow-up to support successful transitions of care, especially when family have not been present during a hospitalization.

About Planetree International

Started by a patient in 1978, Planetree International is a not-for-profit organization that partners with healthcare organizations across the globe to create cultures of person-centered care. The Planetree approach emphasizes the quality of human interactions and caring communication, the importance of connecting personnel to the deeper purpose of their work, and practical strategies for engaging patients, families and communities as true partners in care. As a person-centered care advocacy organization, Planetree International promotes respect, inclusion and compassion toward all who interact with healthcare systems. Our core philosophy of kindness, caring and respect seeks to help realize and sustain patient rights around the world. As part of this mission, Planetree has been developing and compiling resources to support organizations in maintaining person-centered care amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. These resources are available at

<https://planetree.org/person-centered-pandemic-resources/>

About Global Healthcare Accreditation Program for Medical Travel Services

Founded in 2016, the Global Healthcare Accreditation for Medical Travel Services is the only accrediting body focused solely on medical travel services. GHA's international standards and professional norms for medical travel were developed in consultation with leading global experts in the industry, including providers, insurers and employers committed to establish best practices in medical tourism and health tourism, which support healthcare providers in validating quality and patient experience, increasing visibility, and implementing a sustainable business model for providers along the entire medical travel care continuum. GHA received ISQua's International Society for Quality in Health Care External Evaluation Association (IEEA) accreditation in 2019. GHA has developed resources during COVID-19, including COVID-19 Guidelines for Medical Travel Programs

Visit: <https://globalhealthcareaccreditation.com/>