



Visitation Policy Amendment a Distraction to COVID-19 Response Efforts

September 13, 2021 - Throughout last week, the Alaska Legislature debated legislation that could offer narrow tools to aid the health care system's rapid response to the Delta surge. Unfortunately, this has led to a host of misinformation, distraction, and efforts to undermine sound science and mitigation efforts that individual Alaskans can take to persevere through the pandemic.

One such distraction pertains to hospital visitation policies. An amendment was introduced that sought to require visitors be allowed during hospital stays unless certain circumstances warranted otherwise. While the amendment may have been well intentioned, it represents an attempt to remove this type of decision-making from highly qualified medical professionals with clinical training in hospitals.

Visitation policies in hospitals are already strictly regulated by federal law and verified with excruciating detail through accreditation and survey by the Joint Commission and other accrediting bodies. For example, all aspects delineated in the "visitation amendment" are already expressly covered, word-for-word, in federal regulations (see 42 CFR 482.13(h)).

Hospitals recognize the importance of having a support person with a patient throughout a hospital stay. To be clear, every single hospital in Alaska allows visitors. At most, visitation has been limited to 'end of life' moments, births, and pediatric hospital stays.

Unfortunately, at times during the pandemic, in response to each unique community situation, hospitals have been forced to adjust visitation guidelines to balance preventing the spread of COVID-19 with the needs of patients and their loved ones. This has led to heightened measures to guarantee the safety of every life inside a hospital setting from the threat of infection.

No one likes these limits, especially our health care providers, but the health and safety of patients, families, and caregivers is the top priority of hospitals and nursing homes in Alaska. We ask all Alaskans to join us in working to lower transmissions by getting vaccinated and taking reasonable mitigation measures so that we can return to normal for our patients, families, and visitors.

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ABOUT ASHNHA

The Alaska State Hospital and Nursing Home Association (ASHNHA) represents hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, home health agencies, and other health care organizations. Our membership is distributed across Alaska's vast expanse of over half a million square miles, from PeaceHealth Ketchikan Medical Center in Southeast Alaska to Samuel Simmonds Memorial Hospital in Utqiagvik, north of the Arctic Circle. For over 60 years, ASHNHA members have worked together to improve health care in Alaska. For more information, please visit www.ashnha.com.