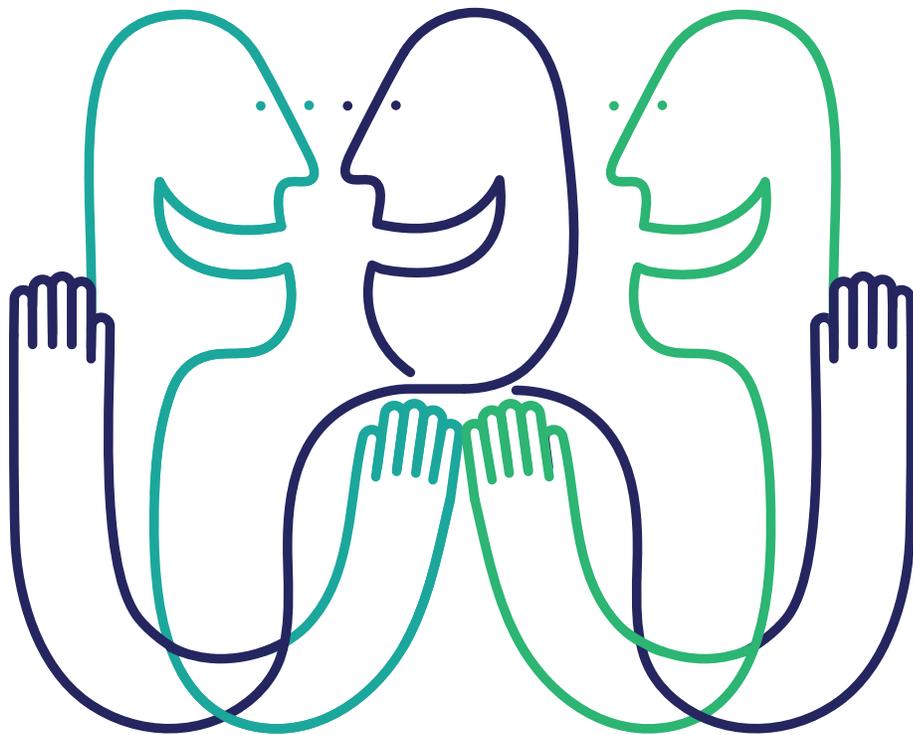


Family Time

Recognizing family members as part of the caregiving team is an idea that's catching on



When an elderly Wisconsin man was admitted to the hospital for a severe stroke last winter, he didn't go alone. He was accompanied by his daughter Jessica (whose last name is omitted to protect patient privacy), his two sons, and his wife, who took turns staying at his side night and day to play the roles of comforter, advocate, communicator, cheerleader, and occasionally even lifesaver.

"I wholeheartedly believe if we hadn't been there 24/7, he wouldn't have made it," said Jessica. "Dad could not have advocated for himself. He had a brain injury. By being there around the clock, we were able to make sure that he didn't roll out of bed. The last couple of times he was in, we also noticed that he was getting pneumonia. Just being there, watching the signs, and knowing when something was off made a huge difference in his care. Even before any doctor would pick up on symptoms, we had it down, so they could get a jump on treating whatever it was."

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The idea of recognizing family members as part of the caregiving team—and removing the barriers to it such as strict visitor policies and no overnight stays—has been around for some time. In 1985, the nonprofit organization Planetree introduced patient directed visiting as part of its original model unit in San Francisco. Throughout the organization’s history, access to family has been one of the top three most requested items from patients and families, according to Randall L. Carter, Senior Vice President. “The family members know what’s most important to the patient, small things that can make a difference, or that they might appreciate or need assistance with.”

One of the most important roles guests can provide is enhancing patient safety. For example, following a renovation to create large, single-bed rooms at Methodist Hospital in Indianapolis, Indiana, families spent more time with patients and falls were cut by two-thirds. Numerous studies have also linked the presence of family in the room to less patient anxiety, less chance of medical errors, better treatment adherence, improved physical and mental health, and even lower mortality rates.

Nemschoff, a Herman Miller company, has been investigating the guest experience in healthcare environments for some time. Recently, it introduced the [Palisade Collection](#), a suite of furnishings designed to solve the issues related to supporting the family’s role in caregiving. Palisade considers—and accommodates—all of the activities that might happen in the patient room, from visiting with the patient to eating, working, watching shows or playing games, charging mobile devices, and sleeping.

Managing these everyday activities while removed from everyday surroundings can be an ongoing challenge for a patient’s guests—and one that Jessica became very familiar with during her father’s extended hospitalization. “Unlike my brothers, I did have the capacity to work remotely, and that made a huge difference for me,” she said. “It helped me feel a little more normal. It also eased the burden for the rest of my family to know that I was there.”