

5 Helpful Guidelines for Showing Christ's Love to Your Friend in the Hospital

Everyone I know has moments of hesitation when confronted with a need to visit a friend in the hospital. Below are the "Five Knows" of visitation which I keep in mind when I have someone I need to visit.

1. Know when to go:

While everyone appreciates that people are concerned, hospital rooms are not designed or intended as places where modesty is a primary concern. And I am not just talking about the wonderful gowns they dress you in. When medical professionals are treating, a patient clothing is a barrier between medical professional and the patient and often needs to be removed or moved, exposing the patient to those in the room. A good guideline is that if the patient normally would not undress in front of you, stay out of the treatment room. At least during treatments, if you are not family or a very close friend, please give time for initial treatment and diagnosis to take place before visiting.

Rule of thumb: Unless the condition is life-threatening, visit on Day Two.

2. Know what you are there for:

Your purpose in visiting the patient is to pray for and with them. You are not there to diagnose or provide horror stories of people who had similar medical issues. No one in the hospital is interested in your anecdote about your friend or relative and the terrible experience they had when they were being treated. No malpractice stories or stories about that friend who was admitted with a sore throat and died from a

flesh-eating bacteria. You also are not there because of your advanced medical degree achieved from watching, years of medical programs on television or staying at a Holiday Inn Express.

Rule of thumb: Do what you came for—be loving, kind encouraging and pray. Listen to what they say, because it will help you know what to pray for and about.

3. Know who you are:

You are a loved one or friend, who is visiting a loved one or friend. There are almost always others who are there for the same reason you are. Please don't act as if you are more important, more spiritual, more connected to the power of G-D's Spirit than the other people visiting.

Rule of thumb: If you pray, invite everyone to participate. Ask them to do more than just stand while you pray; invite them to pray as well.

4. Know whom you are there for:

You are there because of the patient who is in the room with you. Please be considerate and remember they are there. Include them in discussion. Talk to them not about them. Invite them to pray also. Respect their wishes concerning visitors and information sharing. Too often, I have watched as people visited those who were sick and acted as if they were dead.

Rule of thumb: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. If you are there for the patient, then act as if they are the reason you are there.

5. Don't be weird:

If the person you are visiting is a family member or a friend, act like it. Treat them as you normally do. While the situation is different, the people are not. Many times, we act

as if somehow the person we are visiting has become someone we don't know when we visit them in the hospital. The truth is that machines, IVs, monitors, doctors and nurses do not change the person you are with any more than servers, bus staff or managers in a restaurant change the people we are there with. If you usually tell dumb jokes and use puns, then tell bad jokes and puns. If not, don't act weird. The scariest thing you can do for a person is treat them weirdly. They will automatically conclude it is because they are worse off than they are.

Rule of Thumb: Treat people the same way you always have; they are still the same, and you should be, too. Any weirdness is frightening, and being in a hospital is frightening enough.
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