Patient Rights

INTRODUCTION

Patient rights are outlined in the Patient’s Bill of Rights, developed by the American Hospital Association (AHA). This bill refers to the legal rights, or guarantees, for patients receiving medical care, treatment, and services in the United States.

The intent of the Patient’s Bill of Rights is to provide patients with optimal healthcare services while also preserving their dignity, personal rights, and legal rights. In addition, each state defines specific patient rights that are protected under state law.

The AHA was one of the first advocates for developing the Patient’s Bill of Rights. In 1973, the AHA developed 12 rights to inform patients about what to expect during hospitalization.

PURPOSE/OVERALL GOAL

This module outlines the 12 rights that comprise the Patient’s Bill of Rights developed by the American Hospital Association, and explains the responsibilities of nurses and patients in ensuring those rights are honored.

The goal of this module is to make you, as a healthcare provider, aware of patient rights so you can deliver the highest quality care possible.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

After completing this module, the learner should be able to:

1. Describe the rights that patients have according to the Patient’s Bill of Rights
2. Explain the role of healthcare providers in protecting these patient rights
3. Define the role of nurses as patient advocates
4. Define the responsibilities that patients have related to their care
**THE PATIENT’S BILL OF RIGHTS**

First developed by the American Hospital Association (AHA) in 1973 and updated several times since then, the Patient’s Bill of Rights ensures that all patients receive the best possible healthcare while also maintaining their legal and personal rights and preserving their dignity. The following is a summary of these rights.

All patients have the right to:

1. **Considerate and respectful care**
   Patients should be in an environment that preserves their privacy, promotes a positive self-image, and be called by the name they prefer.

2. **Appoint someone to make healthcare decisions for them**
   This involves creating and executing an advance directive.

3. **Current and understandable information about their health**
   Patients have the right to be told the truth about their diagnosis and prognosis, and that it be provided in a language they understand.

4. **Refuse treatment**
   Patients can refuse any portion or all of the treatment recommended or prescribed to them by their medical provider.

5. **Privacy**
   Patients should be allowed privacy during health discussions with their provider, treatments, procedures, and examinations.

6. **Resolution of conflict**
   When patients have a grievance regarding any part of the care provided to them, they should be told about the process or policy involved in how to file a complaint.

7. **Review their medical records**
   A patient is entitled to see their records as well as receive an itemized bill for healthcare services provided.

8. **Refuse to participate in research studies**
   A patient is entitled to refuse an experimental drug or other therapy in a research study, even if it is recommended by their provider.

9. **Confidentiality of their information**
   All communication about a patient’s health, including their history, diagnosis, treatment, and plan of care should be kept confidential between the patient and only those involved in the care of the patient.
10. **Continuity of care**  
A patient is entitled to the most comprehensive, high-quality care at a reasonable cost.

11. **Knowledge of business relationships that influence care**  
Patients have the right to know about relationships among a hospital, educational institutions, other healthcare providers, or payers that may positively or negatively affect the care provided to them.

12. **Be transferred to another medical facility**  
In the event of an emergency, federal regulations require hospitals to either provide treatment until a patient is stabilized, or if capability does not exist, transfer the patient to another hospital. Hospitals are also required to accept transfers if they are capable and provide care as quickly as possible, regardless of the patient’s ability to pay or insurance coverage.
NURSES AS PATIENT ADVOCATE

The toll that illness can take on a patient, and the complicated world of modern healthcare, can make it difficult for patients to understand and exercise their rights.

So it is important for all healthcare professionals, particularly nurses, to serve as advocates in helping to protect the rights of patients who can’t speak or act for themselves.

As advocates, nurses can assist vulnerable patients and their families in creating, implementing, following, and evaluating a plan of care – while ensuring that this plan is consistent with the patient’s values and spiritual and cultural needs.

To become an effective advocate, you must embrace two important concepts:

1. **Reverence.** Reverence means a willingness to respect a patient’s autonomy. Healthcare professionals should not try to control the patient’s thoughts, ideas, suggestions, or principles.

2. **Fidelity.** Fidelity means accepting and upholding the patient’s decisions. This requires open communication and trust.
PATIENT RESPONSIBILITIES

High-quality, effective patient care is the responsibility not only of healthcare providers, but of patients as well.

Patients share these responsibilities related to their care:

1. To follow hospital rules and regulations, and ask about anything they don’t understand

2. To cooperate with caregivers and follow the plan of care to which they have agreed, with the understanding that they can change their mind at any time

3. To notify their physician, nurse, or other caregivers if they don’t understand their diagnosis, treatment, or prognosis

4. To inform caregivers if they feel overwhelmed or too sick to have visitors

5. To ask about what to expect regarding pain and pain management:
   o To discuss pain relief options with the doctor and/or nurse to develop a pain management plan
   o To ask for pain relief when pain first begins
   o To help the doctor and/or nurse in assessing their pain
   o To communicate with them when pain is not relieved
   o To discuss any worries related to taking pain medication

6. To respect the privacy of a roommate, if in a semi-private room

7. To accept financial obligations associated with their care

8. To let nurses, physicians, other caregivers, or the Patient Relations Department know if they are dissatisfied with any aspect of their care

9. To be considerate of the rights of other patients, staff, and policies of the facility, such as rules regarding a non-smoking campus and limits to the number of visitors
CONCLUSION

As a healthcare provider, it is your responsibility to:

- Learn about patient rights so you can advocate for your patients and protect their legal rights in your healthcare facility.
- Inform your patients of their legal rights.
- Ensure your patients have received a written copy of your facility’s Patient’s Bill of Rights in basic and clear language.
- Learn about patient rights that are protected under your state’s statute.

REFERENCES: