

WOULD YOU PLEASE EXCUSE US?

Many adult patients have a family member or companion present during clinical appointments, emergency department visits or inpatient stays. The presence of companions/family members requires thoughtful assessment of the situation and mindfulness of the patient's needs. Consider these issues: Does the patient want the other individual in the room for help with history of illness but not the physical exam? Is there a need to talk with the patient alone? Will the third person be involved in health care decisions, or are there cultural reasons for him or her to be present? Is there any evidence that the third person is forcing the patient to acquiesce to his or her presence? Is their sensitive health information that the patient would not expect shared in front of a family member or companion?

When patients have companions in the inpatient hospital room or office visit room, be sure to speak directly to the patient. It may be necessary and appropriate to ask the companion to excuse you and leave the room so you can talk to the patient. If the patient insists the companion can stay, then you have fulfilled the obligation of giving the patient the opportunity to agree or object to this disclosure of patient information.

At UConn Health, patients may provide us with “permission to communicate” with certain companions/family members, and this allows us to disclose patient information only to the degree that it is necessary and appropriate to assist the patient with their care needs. The bedside and exam room conversations may well exceed this threshold, so please do not hesitate to say “would you please excuse us” so that you can communicate directly with the patient and offer the opportunity for them to agree/object to a disclosure before companions or family members are allowed to be present.

For questions or more information, please do not hesitate to contact the UCH Privacy Office at 860-679-4180 or privacyoffice@uchc.edu.