GUIDELINES FOR VISITORS/EXTERNAL CONTRACTORS ENTERING THE PERIOPERATIVE ENVIRONMENT

INTRODUCTION

A patient’s right to privacy is adhered to at all times and consent is obtained for the presence of a visitor/external contractor during the patient’s surgical care pathway. Only visitors who have obtained permission for definite supportive and/or educational reasons should be allowed into the perioperative environment during a patient’s surgical care pathway. The number of visitors permitted should be kept to a minimum.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS:

- All visitors/external contractors should gain permission prior to their visit to enter the perioperative environment and on arrival report to the appointed person.
- All external contractors must report to medical engineering to obtain a contractors pass before entering the perioperative environment.
- All visitors/contractors entering the perioperative environment must document their arrival and departure in a specific register.
- The correct theatre attire must be provided for all visitors/contractors and they must understand how this is worn. They should be clearly identified with a visitor identity badge.
- Visitors/external contractors should be chaperoned by an assigned member of staff at all times and be aware of perioperative etiquette.
- Visitors/external contractors must be made aware that all information within the perioperative environment is confidential regarding procedures, discussions, technical details and documentation.
- The presence of a visitor should be recorded in the operating register or computerised theatre records, including students, medical device representatives and observers.
- All visitors should be informed of the procedure if they should feel unwell during their visit.
- Medical, nursing and technical personnel who are not designated employees of the hospital, but wish to participate during their visit, must have their professional qualification and health status endorsed by the theatre manager or her deputy prior to their visit.
PATIENT CONSIDERATIONS

- The patient must be informed of why the visitor will be in attendance and asked if they find this acceptable. If the patient refuses to give consent for a visitor to be in attendance their decision should be respected. The patient’s objections should be documented in the patient’s notes or theatre register.
- It is recommended that patients with special needs or requirements are accompanied into the perioperative environment by a support person.
- Children who are undergoing surgery may be accompanied to the anaesthetic room by a parent/carer or a nurse who is familiar to the child. The wishes of the parent/carer must be respected.
- Patients with language problems may be accompanied to theatre by a relative or friend and have an interpreter present. These personnel are required to abide by policies and protocols.
- Confused patients may be accompanied by someone they know.
- Psychiatric patients may be accompanied by a registered mental nurse.
- Relatives and friends should wait in a designated waiting area situated away from the perioperative environment.

SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS

When a patient has to be accompanied by an officer (e.g. royalty or patients under police custody) then attendance of these officers has to be given special consideration.

MEDICAL DEVICE REPRESENTATIVES

The theatre manager or deputy must undertake a risk assessment of visitors such as a medical device representative in accordance with the Health and Safety at work Act (HMSO 1974) and the management of Health and Safety at work Regulations (HMSO 1992a).

- Medical device companies have a duty of care to provide the theatre manager with an appropriate risk assessment for the purpose and practicalities of the visit.
- Medical device representatives may act only as a resource regarding their product and may not scrub or actively participate in patient care.
- Perioperative staff should be familiar with the new technology and had a demonstration of it, prior to direct patient use.
- The operating surgeon must notify the theatre manager of the date, time and procedure where a medical device representative has been requested to attend.

**UNDER AGE VISITORS/EXTERNAL CONTRACTORS**

The management of underage visitors/external contractors to the perioperative environment raises health and safety, consent, confidentiality and risk management issues. A young person is `any person who has not attained the age of 18` (Health and Safety Executive 1997).

It is recommended that all potential work observation students receive a formal trust induction programme and are made aware of the medico-legal issues in relation to their presence within the perioperative setting. The occupational health department also ensures that the students complete a health questionnaire.

The student must undergo a risk assessment to determine their level of inexperience, immaturity and lack of awareness to risk and include;

- The nature, degree and duration of potential exposure to physical, chemical and biological agents, including exposure to radiological procedures or potentially harmful disinfection solutions.
- Organisation of processes and activities, including the layout of the operating theatre in relation to sterile areas so as not to compromise patient care.

It is essential that:
- The patient is made aware that the student is still of school age and if the patient refuses to give consent this decision must be respected.
- If the patient is unable to give their consent due to incapacity then the student must not be allowed access into the theatre.
- All members of staff must be informed that the students are on work observation, are supernumerary and therefore are not permitted to be directly involved in any aspects of patient care.

`Standards and recommendations for Safe Perioperative Practice``
AFPP 2007