

Suggestions for Dealing with Inmate/Prisoner Patients

Various detention facilities bring prisoners/detainees/inmates to our facilities for medical care. We provide these patients with appropriate medical care while understanding that they pose special risks to us as health care providers and to the staff supporting our care and other patients & visitors who may be in the area.

In order to lessen the risk to all involved the following are offered as practical suggestions:

1. An officer(s) must accompany prisoner patients at all times. Officers are aware of the type of risk the prisoner they are accompanying pose to the staff and the community at large. Follow the directions given by the officers. Do not ask officers to step outside because you feel the privacy of the prisoner is compromised! Remember HIPAA does not apply to prisoners. You place yourself in jeopardy by being alone with a prisoner. Do not assume that female prisoners are less dangerous than males; this may not be the case.
2. Officers are with prisoners to provide protection to the prisoner, the health care provider and to those in the immediate vicinity. Friendly conversation or gestures are unnecessary.
3. Position yourself in a room with a prisoner so that you are closest to the exit door in case you need to get out quickly. Do not turn your back on a patient who may be hostile, excited, angry etc. Exit the room by stepping back, cautiously and only turn your back to the prisoner when you are out of range of a kicking foot, arm, etc.
4. DO NOT ask for handcuffs, shackles or other restraints to be removed unless absolutely necessary to provide adequate medical care. Ask the officers about the best way to proceed. If these devices must be removed try to at least leave one set in place, while removing the other, then replace the set removed and remove the other. Do not be misled by the prisoner in handcuffs, about what they can or cannot do. Most are very flexible and can do many things themselves. They like to manipulate this situation to their best advantage. Only the attending physician may order removal.
5. Do not provide any information to prisoners about the need for return visits.
6. Do not discuss within hearing or provide any personal information to prisoners. Do not answer personal questions. Prisoners could use personal information about you, your family or friends to jeopardize your personal safety.
7. Do not become friendly with prisoners. You do not want them to think you are "on their side". Name tags can be placed out of site in a pocket. Prisoner patients only need to know your position on the healthcare team, i.e., Doctor, Nurse, CMA, etc.
8. Do not ride elevators with prisoners and their officers. Take the next elevator. If you see other staff or visitors getting on elevators with prisoners and officers, ask them to wait with you for the next elevator.
9. Do not grant any privileges to prisoners: use of telephone, visitors, going to the restroom, papers to read, talking to staff or others, etc. Officers will decide what prisoners may do while in our facility. Do not give the prisoner anything!
10. Expedite the care of prisoners. The sooner they are treated and on their way back to their facility the less risk to clinic staff and other patients/visitors.
11. Treat all prisoners as potentially dangerous to you and the staff.
12. Private offices and reception areas may contain personal items such as pictures of family, memorabilia, etc., that may lead prisoners to speculate about the person using that office and giving them clues to how to later contact that person. Reception areas and offices used to interview prisoners should be clear of any personal items that identify the staff dealing with prisoners.
13. Stay safe - Use common sense!!!!