



## **Visitor Policy Exemption: Guidelines for Supporting Adult Patients with Disabilities During the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency**

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented a host of challenges and changes to the way we care for those we serve. One such change includes our current policy restricting the number of visitors to our hospitals and health centers. While the safety of our patients, families, faculty and staff remain a top priority, we recognize these stricter policies may impact some patients more than others. Therefore, effective April 16, 2021, Michigan Medicine's visitor policy will include an exception for adult patients with disabilities: If requested by a patient with a disability, one support person may remain with the patient while in our care, and in compliance with other safety policies.

The following guidelines are designed to comply with Title II and III of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). These mandates, along with other state and federal laws, require health care organizations to provide reasonable policy accommodations to ensure persons with disabilities equal access to medical care and/or treatment. A request by an adult patient with disabilities, or their representative, to have a support person present is an example of a reasonable policy accommodation.

Adult patients with disabilities requiring a support person may include, but are not limited to, people who:

- Are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, and deafblind
- Cannot rely on speech to communicate
- Have mobility impairments
- Have psychosocial, intellectual, developmental, or cognitive disabilities

People with disabilities may rely on their support person for orientation, physical and emotional support, anxiety management, and assistance with making decisions that would otherwise be difficult to accomplish with other members of the health care team.

### **Support Person Definition**

A "support person" is not considered the same as a "visitor". Their presence is permitted as they are considered "medically necessary" to patient care, communication and autonomy, and essential to ensure equal access to treatment.

A support person may be a family member, personal care assistant, communicator, or other disability support person. The individual should be over the age of 18 and allowed to remain with the patient where feasible throughout the duration of their care or treatment at a Michigan Medicine facility.



## **Guidelines for Emergency Room as well as Inpatient and Outpatient Care (including surgery, procedures and clinic visits)**

**One primary support person may accompany an adult patient with a disability who needs assistance. A second support person can be identified to allow for patient coverage should the primary support person need respite. However, only one support person is allowed to be present at any particular time.**

### **Commitment to Safety**

All support persons are required to follow Michigan Medicine's COVID-19 Infection Control policies while at any Michigan Medicine facility (i.e., patient and exam rooms, halls, waiting areas, common areas, parking lots and structures). A mask will be provided (if not available) as well as any additional Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) deemed necessary by the hospital or clinic for the duration of the visit or stay.

No visitors or support person(s) will be permitted for adult patients with disabilities who have confirmed or suspected COVID-19, except for in extenuating circumstances and will be determined on a case by case basis.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, every effort shall be made to support the patient with disabilities employing virtual communication options whenever possible.

### **Contact Us**

If you have any questions regarding this policy exception, please call **Patient Relations and Clinical Risk** at 734-936-4330. For more information on our current visitation policies during COVID-19, please visit: <https://www.uofmhealth.org/coronavirus/michmed-visitor-guidelines-covid-19>.

### **Michigan Medicine Disability Visitation Statement:**

Michigan Medicine adult patients with disabilities that include, but are not limited to, cognitive and developmental impairment, altered mental state, mobility impairment, communication barriers or behavioral concerns, upon request, are allowed one designated support person to remain with them as feasible. This support person can be a family member, personal care assistant, communicator or similar disability support person who is knowledgeable about the management of patient's care and able to provide the physical



or emotional assistance to the patient while in our care. This visitor policy modification is to be applied provided that all proper and reasonable precautions are taken to prevent the spread of infection.

Nothing in these guidelines should be interpreted as altering Michigan Medicine's obligations to provide patients with effective communication supports or required services, regardless of the presence of a designated support person or other reasonable accommodation, consistent with applicable federal and state laws.