

Watsonville hospital adjusts visiting hours

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WATSONVILLE — The security guards are now called "hosts" at Watsonville Community Hospital, where officials are working to revamp visiting policies.

"There used to be too many visitors out and around in the hallways, and patients said it was hard to get enough rest," says hospital vice president Ed Epperson.

Hospital administrators recently rewrote their hours and policies to address the needs of their patients, staff and visitors.

Visiting hours now begin at noon, instead of 10 a.m., to give patients an opportunity to bathe, take medication and walk around in peace. Children under 12 years old generally are not allowed to visit, and each patient can have only two visitors a time.

Hospital spokeswoman Cori Allen says there are exceptions to all of these rules, and the basic mandate is that patients can decide who visits them and for how long.



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Micael Millan visits new son Ramon and Ramon's mom, Martha Roldan, Thursday.

There are also blanket exceptions for siblings of newborns, who are always welcome to visit between 6 and 7 p.m.

Watsonville Community Hospital officials say their new, more strict visiting hours have made their hospital a quieter, safer and healthier place to be.

"The improvement has been monumentally significant," said hospital spokeswoman Cori Allen.

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The security guards, who used to wear uniforms, are now outfitted in blazers and slacks. They are on hand around the clock to inform visitors of the new rules, carry messages to patients and escort people in and out of the hospital.

Prior to the change, about 8 percent of patients who returned questionnaires after their stays said they were bothered by noise from other visitors.

Since the new policy, there have been no negative comments about noise, Epperson said.

Epperson said administrators paid special attention to the Hispanic community when they rewrote the policy. More than half of the hospital's patients are Hispanic, and Epperson noted that there are cultural differences that affect family visits.

"We found that in the Hispanic culture in particular, there was a feeling that when someone was sick, the entire family had an obligation to visit them in the hospital," Epperson said.

At this point, if a patient wants to squeeze a dozen relatives into their room at the same time, they can ask a nurse for special permission to do so.

"The real key is that we're doing what the patient wants," said Allen. "The patient is in control here."

At San Jose Medical Center, where officials studied cultural differences and needs among maternity patients, Sharon Kroeber says there is an effort to accommodate Hispanic families who often want to visit new babies en masse.

"Very often with our Hispanic moms, the birth of a new baby is a very exciting event for a lot of people," Kroeber said. "It is part of the culture that babies are very appreciated."

Kroeber said there are few restrictions on maternity visitors — any number of adults and children can come into a room, and a father, grandmother or sibling can spend the night.

"We do sometimes have problems where there are too many kids running up and down the hall, but we just work with them," Kroeber said.