

Chaperones

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Purpose

To provide an environment in which the public (patients and/or families) and health professionals are free of any potential for coercion, harassment, sexual or other exploitation.

Scope/Audience

All health professionals.

Policy statements

Communication

Communication with patients in advance of the components and reasons of any physical exam performed upon them is crucial to ensure there is no misunderstanding of the reasons for and conduct of the examination.

Patients

Patients have the right for a third party to be present during any physical examinations if they wish.

Patient should be informed prior to the commencement of the consultation that they may have a person of their choosing with them.

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Paediatric patients should always have a parent or guardian present during any physical examination of an infant, pre-schooler or child. Teenagers should be given the opportunity to be involved in the decision of who the chaperone should be.

If the parent / guardian elect not to be present or their presence is not considered to be in the child's best interests, the healthcare professional should request a colleague to be chaperone.

Third Party

This may be a person who has accompanied the patient and/or another health professional/support staff (of the same gender as patient).

Health Professionals

Health professionals have the right to insist that a mutually acceptable third party be present during any physical examinations.

Health professionals may decline to conduct a physical examination if the patient refuses consent for a mutually acceptable third party to be in the room.

Documentation

The use of a chaperone and their name should be documented in the Clinical Record

If healthcare professionals are unable to have a chaperone present, this should be clearly documented along with the reasons why.

Exceptions

In life threatening situations the difficulties may be such that these rights have to be waived, but health professionals will continue to treat the patient in a professional and ethical manner that respects their dignity and privacy.

Commentary

It is important that health professionals protect themselves from any misinterpretation of their conduct during the course of the physical examination. Doctors are particularly vulnerable when conducting internal and other physical examinations, and in some other sensitive situations where dialogue is on matters of a sexual or intimate nature.

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The presence of a third party, a chaperone, in such cases may make the patient feel more comfortable and confident, and will minimise the risk of any allegations of misconduct. This applies to both male and female health professionals.

The Code of Health and Disability Services Consumer Rights provides that “every consumer has the right to have one or more support persons of his or her choice present, except where safety may be compromised or another consumer’s rights may be unreasonably infringed”.

The Code also provides that every consumer has the right:

- To be treated with respect.
- To have his or her privacy respected.
- To be free from discrimination, coercion, harassment, and sexual, financial or other exploitation.
- To have services provided in a manner that respects the dignity and independence of the individual.
- To have services provided that comply with legal, professional, ethical, and other relevant standards.
- To an environment that enables both consumer and provider to communicate openly, honestly, and effectively.

Policy Owner	Corporate Quality & Risk
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