

# Families like looser ICU visitation policies

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(HealthDay)—Many hospitals still restrict who can visit critically ill patients and when. But new survey results suggest that lifting such restrictions can improve family satisfaction and patient well-being.

"The term 'visiting hours' is obsolete due to the growing evidence related to the wide-ranging benefits of open access for ICU [intensive-care unit] families," said senior study author Dr. Samuel Brown. He is director of the Center for Humanizing Critical Care at Intermountain Medical Center in Murray, Utah.

The study involved 103 family members visiting [patients](#) in the [intensive care unit](#) and 128 ICU nurses. About half were surveyed before an unrestricted patient visitation [policy](#) was implemented at the medical center and half were questioned after.

With the new policy, visitors are allowed at all times, if patients agree and are well enough. Previously, visits were restricted to 90 minutes each morning and evening.

The new policy dramatically improved family satisfaction with the ICU visitation hours and waiting room atmosphere, the study found. Nurses also perceived higher visitor satisfaction with the updated visitation policy, the researchers noted.

The study results were published Jan. 4 in the *American Journal of Critical Care*.

A growing number of hospitals have developed more open ICU visitation policies following a 2010 presidential memorandum and new regulations from the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, the researchers said in background notes.

"Numerous studies have shown that more liberal visitation policies lead to improved family, patient and nurse [satisfaction](#) without representing a safety risk," Brown said in a journal news release. "In fact, studies have suggested that patients do better medically when their families are free to accompany them during their ICU stay."

**More information:** The Institute for Patient-and-Family-Centered Care provides more on family presence in the [ICU](#).

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