

Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri



Abstract

INTENSIVE CARE UNIT “OPEN” TO FAMILY VISITS

19th of July 2013

The Opinion focuses on a particular aspect of the healthcare organization, the one concerning visiting policies (accompanying and family visits) in Intensive Care Units: an application, not always adequately considered, of the principle of respect of individuals within healthcare treatments (Art. 32, par. 2 Cost.). This principle implies taking care of the patient, not just as an isolated individual and as a mere body to be treated, but as a person with meaningful relationships from which he or she must not be forcibly separated adding loneliness to the already serious disease condition. Achieving, in this way, also an improvement of the medical quality of treatments.

Numerous data suggest, in fact, that the promotion of access to ICUs for family members and visitors is not only not dangerous for patients, but is in fact beneficial both to them and to their families. In particular, the "openness" of ICUs does not cause an increase in infections in patients, while the cardiovascular complications and the anxiety scores are statistically and significantly reduced. Furthermore, patients show significantly lower hormonal indexes of stress. A further positive effect is represented by the sharp reduction of anxiety of family members. For example, mothers of children hospitalized in "open" ICUs have lower stress indexes than mothers of children staying in "limited access" ICUs.

Therefore the Italian intensive care unit organization should be adapted to the "open ICU" model, bridging the gap with other Countries in Europe and America that have long been successfully orientated in this direction. However, the Opinion clears out that "open" ICU does not mean "no rules ICU", and a legislation that allows to organize the visits in order to protect the other values at stake is thus useful and necessary. The Opinion also highlights the problem of the standards of conduct which the visitors are called to respect in order to ensure a well-organized and profitable access to hospitals and in particular to intensive care units aimed at preserving the places and creating a comfortable environment for people.