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Equal Treatment of Patients' Choice is Fundamental Human Right

WASHINGTON – The American Academy of Nursing (AAN) supports President Obama's memorandum prohibiting discrimination in hospital visitation. The President's directive will ensure that hospitals that participate in Medicare or Medicaid respect the rights of patients to designate visitors and do not deny visitation privileges on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability.

The memo to Kathleen Sebelius, Secretary of Health and Human Services, requests that the agency adopt new provisions of compassion and companionship, and develop recommendations within 180 days. The memo can be viewed at whitehouse.gov.

“Respecting the rights of hospital patients to receive visitors and to designate surrogate decision makers for medical emergencies is essential to good health practices,” said AAN Cultural Competency Expert Panel Co-Chair Dale M. Allison, PhD, WHNP, BC, FNP, APRN, FAAN. “It is the right thing to do and needs to be fully and thoughtfully implemented immediately throughout the nation.”

The Academy's Cultural Competency Expert Panel, which advises the AAN Board of Directors, applauds this action as a basic human right for all individuals to have the person(s) of choice be present when one is most physically and mentally vulnerable. The United States has many ethnic, military, and gender-based cultures that require unique understanding to work cohesively to bring the best practices for the best health outcomes to our society.

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