

Patients' code of rights set out by nurses' group

PATIENTS should have the right to refuse to undergo any test, examination or treatment unless it is required by law, and if treatment is refused, patients should not be liable to be discharged from hospital.

This is one of the key provisions in a patients' code of rights and responsibilities adopted by the New Zealand Nurses' Association.

The code, which sets out 17 rights and nine responsibilities, was accepted at the association's annual conference in Nelson last week.

The code was drawn up to help hospital boards and other health bodies draft their own codes.

Other major items in the code state that patients should have the right to:

- Receive full information in layman's terms about their health or illness, the proposed course of treatment, any risks

attendant on such treatment, the outcome and prognosis.

- Clear, complete and accurate information about the nature and purpose of any proposed examination, test, treatment or procedure, and whether this is for research, education, or treatment purposes, before being asked to consent.

- Confidentiality of all communications between health care staff and the patient.

- Participate in decisions regarding health care.

- Be treated with reasonable skill and care by professionally qualified staff.

- Know the identity and professional status of all persons providing health services.

- Full information about, and access to, free health care services whenever such facilities are available.

- Prompt attention.

- Be treated with respect and dignity, and be afforded privacy during discussion and treatment.

- An interpreter when English is not understood.

- Observe cultural, ethnic and religious practices and customs if they can be reasonably accommodated.

- Wear whatever clothing is desired, with consideration for others, and unless special clothing is required for specific examinations and treatment.

- Have reasonable contact with persons outside the hospital, or institution, by means of visitors of choice, and by ready access to the telephone.

- Have close friends or relatives stay 24 hours a day with children, terminally ill and critically ill patients, provided in the case of the critically ill, it is not medically contra-indicated.

Another clause, which stated that patients had the right of access to and interpretation of, all information contained in

their medical records, was to have been included in the code.

However, the association referred it back to its national executive who are to consider how legal difficulties might be overcome. Medical files are legally the property of doctors or institutions.

The association decided that patients, as well as having rights, have these responsibilities:-

- To show consideration to other patients on noise, lighting smoking, and the conduct of visitors.

- To respect other patients' observations of religious, cultural, and ethnic practices.

- To respect the privacy of other patients, and to keep in confidence any information gained from them.

- To inform the appropriate people if unable to keep an appointment.

- To know and abide by the rules of the health care facility.

- To be frank and honest with health personnel about health, medications, and treatments, previous illnesses, and the family history of illness.

- To ask for clarification or further explanation of anything not understood.

- To co-operate with treatment agreed on.

- To advise the appropriate authority of any complaint.