

City Clerk
Cambridge, Mass.

Dear Sir:

I enclose a copy of a
complaint I made to the
Administrator of the
Cambridge Hospital.
Please forward it to the
appropriate department
concerned with the
hospital.

Thank you.

Elizabeth Noble

162 Prospect Street
Cambridge, Mass. 02139

October 5, 1976.

Mr. Leslie McLeod, Administrator
Cambridge Hospital
1493 Cambridge Street
Cambridge, Mass. 02139.

Dear Mr. McLeod:

I am writing to deplore the policy of the Cambridge hospital as it was enforced during our visit to the Emergency Room on Sunday September 26th, between 3.45 and 4.30 p.m. Our complaint is that the staff refused to allow us to remain together while my husband received sutures for a laceration near his elbow.

It never occurred to us, as I parked the car and my husband was admitted, that I would not be allowed to join him while he received medical attention. It was to our complete astonishment, then, having found the room where he was waiting, when the staff informed us that I would have to leave before they could begin. We replied that my presence would offer companionship and moral support. They repeated that I must leave. I explained that it was our mutual decision, our right even, to stay together. They continued to insist. One nurse stated that "visitors" were not permitted, another asked if I were his guardian and someone else said that I might faint. (Although I had witnessed the accident, examined the wound and shared the decision to go to the hospital!) A further justification put forth by the staff was that all the hospital policies must be enforced at all times, otherwise hospital organization would be greatly impaired, particularly at busy times. (However, during our visit they were not busy; my husband was seen to immediately and had the treatment room to himself).

The arrogant attitude of medical personnel who believe that only they can decide when clients may faint or "get in the way", I thought, was on the decline. These tired old excuses are reminiscent of those used in the past to keep husbands out of Labor and Delivery and it was most anachronistic to hear them mouthed in these times of increased consumer awareness and hospital sensitivity to the rights of patients. Since the consumer pays the bill, it is not simply a matter of being grateful for help ministered. Consumers are entitled to participate in the health care process and they certainly do evaluate the level of service.

Interestingly, the staff concerned, Dr. Bothe, M. Fay, R.N., and a male paramedic who refused to give his name and position, stated that while they personally were quite indifferent, it was "hospital policy" which they had no choice but to enforce. To the extent, it became uncomfortably obvious, that they were prepared to

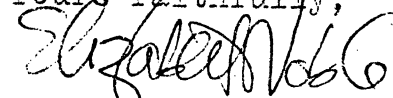
argue indefinitely with us and even offered to wrap a bandage around the wound after my husband suggested leaving to look for a more cooperative facility. It was made quite clear that the need for medical attention was low in priority compared with matters of hospital policy. By this time, my concern was mounting for the patient and I felt that for his sake the treatment should proceed, albeit it on such disagreeable terms.

An administration is perhaps gratified to learn that the staff display such obedience and concern to enforce the policy to the nth degree. But to my infuriation, I observed that a double standard operated. While I waited by the nursing station, I watched a Cambridge police officer smoke a cigarette while he spoke on the telephone. He stood beside a visible "NO SMOKING" sign, butting the ash onto the floor. This he did in full view of a security guard and 4 members of the nursing staff. Afterwards, I questioned the staff why they saw fit to overlook that violation of hospital policy, which as an air pollutant and fire hazard had an unquestionably deleterious effect on those in the area, particularly patients arriving with open wounds. Yet they had insisted on my withholding companionship from my husband for what did not appear to be of any direct gain to the staff and other patients. The reply was: "You are very picky today" ! The male nurse went on to say that since my husband was a "grown-up", I was being "very hyper about a small matter". I did not consider it at small matter that medical treatment would be withheld, unless on their terms - which I, as a "grown-up", considered to be unreasonable. Furthermore, how much more serious a matter it would have been if a child had been involved. The psychological trauma that children experience in times of shock, pain and fear when they are separated from family members was the motivating force in the formation of the group "Children in Hospitals" working for change. Apparently the battle for the rights and feelings of adults is not over either.

Cambridge Hospital receives city funds, and although I am a taxpayer in Cambridge I shall not seek its services again. Furthermore, I shall inform the Cambridge community of the kind of hostility they can expect in the Emergency Room, so that they know in advance of their options in a situation where time may be too crucial to choose to travel to another institution. Copies of this letter will be sent to the City Council, Cambridge Chronicle, Harvard Medical School and the various health care plans which make use of your hospital.

I hope that your reply is not couched in terms of "hospital policy": THAT is the very bone of my contention. If you are not prepared to work for change and to improve the public relations of your staff - then perhaps you should consider placing a sign, "FAMILY MEMBERS WILL NOT BE ALLOWED TO ACCOMPANY PATIENTS" at the entrance to the Emergency Room so that concerned clients can move on to a more progressive hospital.

Yours faithfully,



Elizabeth Noble

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