

The Patients' Rights Charter

For many decades the vast majority of the South African population has experienced either a denial or violation of fundamental human rights, including rights to health care services. To ensure the realisation of the right of access to health care services as guaranteed in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act No 108 of 1996), the Department of Health is committed to upholding, promoting and protecting this right and therefore proclaims this PATIENTS' RIGHTS CHARTER as a common standard for achieving the realisation of this right.

This Charter is subject to the provisions of any law operating within the Republic of South Africa and to the financial means of the country.

A healthy and safe environment

Everyone has the right to a healthy and safe environment that will ensure their physical and mental health or well-being, including adequate water supply, sanitation and waste disposal as well as protection from all forms of environmental danger, such as pollution, ecological degradation or infection.

Participation in decision-making

Every citizen has the right to participate in the development of health policies and everyone has the right to participate in decision-making on matters affecting one's health.

Access to healthcare

Everyone has the right of access to health care services that include:

- i. receiving timely emergency care at any health care facility that is open regardless of one's ability to pay;
- ii. treatment and rehabilitation that must be made known to the patient to enable the patient to understand such treatment or rehabilitation and the consequences thereof;
- iii. provision for special needs in the case of newborn infants, children, pregnant women, the aged, disabled persons, patients in pain, person living with HIV or AIDS patients;



- iv. counselling without discrimination, coercion or violence on matters such as reproductive health, cancer or HIV/AIDS;
- v. palliative care that is affordable and effective in cases of incurable or terminal illness;
- vi. a positive disposition displayed by health care providers that demonstrate courtesy, human dignity, patience, empathy and tolerance; and
- vii. health information that includes the availability of health services and how best to use such services and such information shall be in the language understood by the patient.

Knowledge of one's health insurance/medical aid scheme

A member of a health insurance or medical aid scheme is entitled to information about that insurance or medical aid scheme and to challenge, where necessary, the decisions of such health insurance or medical aid scheme relating to the member.

Choice of health services

Everyone has the right to choose a particular health care provider for services or a particular health facility for treatment provided that such choice shall not be contrary to the ethical standards applicable to such health care providers or facilities, and the choice of facilities in line with prescribed service delivery guide lines.

Be treated by a named health care provider

Everyone has the right to know the person that is providing health care and therefore must be attended to by clearly identified health care providers.

Confidentiality and privacy

Information concerning one's health, including information concerning treatment may only be disclosed with informed consent, except when required in terms of any law or an order of the court.



Informed consent

Everyone has the right to be given full and accurate information about the nature of one's illnesses, diagnostic procedures, the proposed treatment and the costs involved, for one to make a decision that affects anyone of these elements.

Refusal of treatment

A person may refuse treatment and such refusal shall be verbal or in writing provided that such refusal does not endanger the health of others.

Be referred for a second opinion

Everyone has the right to be referred for a second opinion on request to a health provider of one's choice.

Continuity of care

No one shall be abandoned by a health care professional worker or a health facility which initially took responsibility for one's health.

Complain about health services

Everyone has the right to complain about health care services and to have such complaints investigated and to receive a full response on such investigation.

Responsibilities of the patient

Every patient or client has the following responsibilities:

- to advise the health care providers on his or her wishes with regard to his or her death.
- to comply with the prescribed treatment or rehabilitation procedures.
- to enquire about the related costs of treatment and/or rehabilitation and to arrange for payment.



- to take care of health records in his or her possession.
- to take care of his or her health.
- to care for and protect the environment.
- to respect the rights of other patients and health providers.
- to utilize the health care system properly and not abuse it.
- to know his or her local health services and what they offer.
- to provide health care providers with the relevant and accurate information for diagnostic, treatment, rehabilitation or counselling purposes.