



PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIAT
FOR HEALTH



PATIENT'S CHARTER

FOREWORD

Health and healthcare are a priority for each and every one of us. Prevention of ill health as well as timely and appropriate care when we need it are high on our agenda. Being aware of our rights and responsibilities as patients is therefore essential. This Patient Charter, the first of its kind in Malta, is designed to do just that.

The Charter addresses the manner in which the health care service is to be provided, the level of quality expected and the time by when care should be provided in relation to the acuity of a patient's condition.

It is structured around the following 8 principles that form the foundation for a safe equitable healthcare service delivery:

1. Health Protection
2. Access
3. Information
4. Participation & Informed Consent
5. Privacy and Confidentiality
6. Dignity and Respect
7. Safe healthcare
8. Comments and Complaints

This document is being presented as a basis for consultation. All stakeholders are invited to actively participate in the discussion.

Chris Fearne
Parliamentary Secretary for Health

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD..... 2

Introduction..... 4

Definitions..... 5

Principle 1: Health Protection 7

Principle 2: Access 8

Principle 3: Information..... 11

Principle 4: Shared decision making and informed consent..... 13

Principle 5: Privacy & Confidentiality..... 15

Principle 6: Dignity and Respect 16

Principle 7: Safety 17

Principle 8: Comments and Complaints 19

Conclusion 20

Further Information 21

INTRODUCTION

This charter highlights the level of service one would expect when utilizing public health services. The Charter is aimed to facilitate the relationship between service users and service providers. It aims to provide a means to allow the service to work effectively and to make sure that the resources are used efficiently. Expected increased accountability will ensure a positive effect on the delivery of care. Seeing that this is the first National Patient Charter and that in a number of fields there is an element of catching up to do, it is envisaged that the targets set out in this Charter shall be fully achieved within one year from its publication.

This document is being presented as a basis for consultation.

Main Principles

The Charter is based on the principles that form the foundation for a safe, equitable, healthcare service delivery. These principles have been established following a thorough review of local and international patient charters and other similar instruments. The rights and responsibilities represent a commitment or definition of what should be expected by the users and the health providers within the Public Health Service. They are designed to promote care which is personalized, disease preventative and participatory, as stated in the Health Act.

The eight principles are the right to:

1. Health Protection
2. Access
3. Information
4. Participation and Informed Consent
5. Privacy and Confidentiality
6. Dignity and Respect
7. Safe Healthcare
8. Comments and Complaints

These principles set the service users' participation as a key priority in all healthcare services.

DEFINITIONS

The terms used in this document unless otherwise stated are defined as follows:

Beneficence:	Beneficence is action that is done for the benefit of others. Beneficent actions can be taken to help prevent or remove harms or to simply improve the situation of others.
Carers:	Individuals who, as significant others or friends, care for other persons to whom healthcare is being provided.
Charter:	A statement of commitments on right and responsibilities.
Point of Clinical decision:	The point at which the patient has had all the required investigations, and the clinician has recorded the required intervention and or care pathway according to the policies established by the relevant public healthcare entity.
Cross-border healthcare:	Healthcare provided or prescribed in a Member State other than the Member State of affiliation, Malta.
Emergency:	A situation requiring immediate attention and remedial action.
Health:	A state of complete physical, mental and social well being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.
Healthcare organisation:	The organisation/institution delivering the care ranging from primary, secondary to tertiary care.
Healthcare providers:	The individuals who are providing the necessary care to the patient.
Healthcare services:	All healthcare services delivered within a hospital, clinic or other community care settings.
Local private healthcare	Any private healthcare provider in the Maltese territory.
Provider:	
Minister:	The Minister responsible for health.
Non-maleficence	Non-maleficence means to “do no harm.” Physicians must refrain from providing ineffective treatments or acting with malice toward patients.
Patient:	A person who is receiving, or has received, medical attention, care, or treatment, whether in a healthcare setting or otherwise.
Relative:	Relatives as defined under article 30 of the Social Security Act, but also every person who maintains a close personal relationship with the patient.

Responsibilities: the obligation of patients/ services users towards the health services to run efficiently.

Service users: individuals who use healthcare services as patients or clients.

Significant others: individuals who have a close relationship with the patient.

PRINCIPLE 1: HEALTH PROTECTION

The right to have services which promote health and wellbeing, prevent disease, support and empower those with chronic illnesses to actively participate in self care.

One has the right:

1. To receive information and advice on how to stay as healthy as possible.
2. To take part in state-run screening and immunization programmes where available and appropriate, and as laid down by established protocols.
3. To receive information and advice on how to best self-manage an existing health problem.
4. To expect that Hospital Acquired Infections (HAI) are given due priority by all healthcare providers in health settings.
5. To receive the above irrespective of one's age, colour, disability or illness, gender, marriage, civil partnership, maternity, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, nationality, politics, or social status.

One has the responsibility:

1. To take care of oneself by adopting a healthy lifestyle.
2. To seek information and skills on how to maintain and protect one's health.
3. To take immunization to prevent the spread of infectious disease.
4. To engage in regular check-ups and report any health related changes to a healthcare provider.
5. To seek assistance from support groups, NGO's and people living with similar conditions.
6. To adopt a positive attitude towards life and health.
7. To respect the rights of others and not to endanger other people's life and health.
8. In the case of a minor, health protection, care and a healthy lifestyle of the minor shall be the responsibility of the parent or guardian.

PRINCIPLE 2: ACCESS

The right to access healthcare services according to the individual health needs and requirements.

One has the right:

1. To an efficient medical response system.
 2. To receive emergency medical treatment should the need arise.
 3. To have access to health services and medicines in accordance with the entitlements determined by the Law of Malta.
 4. To be provided with a specialist led care plan, where this is clinically recommended. The care plan shall be under the responsibility of an appropriate specialist health professional assigned by the responsible entity.
 5. To be provided with immediate care/intervention in an immediate urgent case: (An emergency condition is one that can permanently impair or endanger the life of an individual if not treated immediately). Care/intervention must be initiated immediately upon the first contact with a competent health professional.
 6. To be provided with specialist-led treatment/intervention from time of clinical decision within a timeframe as stipulated hereunder, unless one chooses to wait longer or it is clinically decided that one waits longer.
 - a. **In an urgent case:** (a condition that has the immediate potential to deteriorate to the point that it may become an emergency or is life threatening). Care/Intervention must be initiated within 8 weeks. (Not applicable if deterioration is diagnosed);
 - b. **In a non urgent case (Elective):** Care/intervention must be initiated within 18 months for a condition causing a lesser degree of pain, dysfunction or disability, that is unlikely to deteriorate quickly and that does not have the immediate potential to become an emergency.
- 6.1 The right to start treatment within these timeframes does not apply:
- a. if one chooses to wait longer;
 - b. if delaying the start of one's treatment is in one's best clinical interests, for example where further investigation is required;
 - c. if it is clinically appropriate for one's condition to be actively monitored in secondary care without clinical intervention or diagnostic procedures at that stage;
 - d. if one fails to attend for a scheduled appointment without a good and valid reason or;

e. if the treatment is no longer necessary.

f. Accident and Emergency department:

Acceptable waiting times	50 th percentile	90 th percentile
Time for physician initial assessment	2 hours	4 hours
Length of stay		
Discharged patients	4 hours	6 hours
Time to transfer to in-patient bed (time from decision to admit patient)	6 hours	8 hours

7. To expect to be told how long one is likely to have to wait when placed on a waiting list for surgery, a procedure, test or treatment.
8. To seek preauthorization for healthcare through a local private healthcare provider or in another European country for state or private treatment, in accordance with the Maltese Cross-Border Healthcare Regulations, under the Health Act, if a predetermined maximum acceptable waiting time is not respected. Individuals who may wish to receive further information and clarifications about this right may contact The National Contact Point through link : <https://health.gov.mt/en/cbhc/Pages/Cross-Border.aspx>
9. To access Public health services in Malta and Gozo irrespective of age, colour, disability or illness, gender, marriage, civil partnership, maternity, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, nationality, politics, or social status.
10. To have available adequate and timely healthcare based on one's need and not on one's ability to pay. This must take into account the rights of other patients, clinical judgment and the most efficient use of resources and entitlements available as provided by the Ministry for Health.
11. To receive information on the availability of all National Health Services in Malta.
12. To be transferred to another public service clinic or public hospital when a recommended medical treatment is not available at the public hospital that the patient was admitted to (e.g. Gozo to Malta transfer).
13. To expect that the national healthcare policy makers will assess the country's healthcare needs and provide the services it considers necessary to meet them.

One has the responsibility:

1. To attend for a scheduled appointment.
2. To be on time for scheduled appointments. One has to notify a member of the healthcare staff if one is not able to attend.
3. To be at home at the agreed date and time if one is availing himself/herself of community healthcare services.

4. To provide healthcare providers with up-to-date information about one's contact details.
5. To use health services appropriately and responsibly. This includes avoidance of wastage of resources.
6. To understand that there are pressures and limitations of resources on the health service and those working within it.
7. To access the National Accident and Emergency department appropriately.

PRINCIPLE 3: INFORMATION

The right to give and receive information

One has the right:

1. To receive all the information about their medical condition, the care one is receiving, care options within established local parameters, risks and prognosis.
2. To be given information in a way one can understand using the appropriate medium and language when necessary.
3. To request more information if one wants to know more. To expect to be told the names and roles of the healthcare providers responsible for one's care. Every employee should be wearing an identification badge that clearly displays his/her name and designation within the organization.
4. To request a second opinion where possible from an equivalent health provider. This process should not impose any hardship to the patient.
5. To ask questions about one's condition.
6. To get support and enough information to participate in the management of one's condition. This should include how and when to take medications and how to access other support services that could help improve the patient's wellbeing.
7. To receive the appropriate information on how to assess and, if possible, self manage pain.
8. To receive information related to the rules and regulations of a healthcare organization one is currently being cared for in.
9. To expect to receive all the relevant information related to clinical trials of any form that one may be subjected to.
10. To participate and discuss ethical matters that may arise in the course of one's care including treatment, participation in research or educational projects.
11. To be given an explanation of the need for transfer to another unit or facility, for example from Gozo to Malta or vice versa, or from a ward to another ward, or from a public hospital to another hospital.
12. To access information and advice on how to give feedback, make comments and raise concerns, or complaints about the care received and the services used through the Customer Care section within each healthcare establishment.

One has the responsibility:

1. To seek support, information, and skills to adapt a healthier lifestyle and/or manage his/her condition.
2. To inform healthcare providers of any changes in one's contact details.
3. To provide complete and accurate information about one's health and medical history, including medications, hospital stays, herbal remedies and any other matters that pertain to one's health.
4. To be truthful and to describe symptoms to their best ability to healthcare providers.
5. To request information or clarification about one's health status or treatment.
6. To discuss pain management, ask for pain relief when needed, and to inform a healthcare provider about the effectiveness of any treatment being prescribed.
7. To comply with the written information on the discharge plan as discussed and agreed with the healthcare providers, and report any changes in one's condition following discharge.
8. To withhold from initiating or participating in fraudulent healthcare and to report unethical behavior of healthcare providers to the appropriate authorities. This includes refraining from requesting incorrect information, receipts, certificates or unnecessary treatment.

PRINCIPLE 4: SHARED DECISION MAKING AND INFORMED CONSENT

ONE HAS THE RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE COLLABORATIVE PROCESS OF DECISION MAKING RELATED TO ONE'S PARTICULAR HEALTHCARE NEEDS AND TO MAKE AN INFORMED CONSENT ABOUT ONE'S TREATMENT AND CARE.

One has the right:

1. To be given all the information related to risks, benefits and consequences of refusal of any treatment or care, for one to be able to make an informed choice. When mentally competent, one has the right to accept or refuse any treatment, examination, test or screening procedure that is offered in accordance with the law. Refusal of treatment must be signed and documented; this decision must be counter signed by a witness.
2. To participate in decisions about one's care. Healthcare professionals should refrain from making decisions related to care and treatment without the patient's direct participation except in exceptional cases.
3. To be actively involved during ward rounds. The physicians should discuss the care plan formulated during ward rounds with the patient and ensure understanding.
4. To involve the family or carer and the family doctor in any form of decision making process if one wishes to.
5. To discharge oneself even if the decision is against the physician's advice unless:
 - (a) One has certain infectious diseases that may influence the health of others, or;
 - (b) One is incapable of maintaining his/her own safety or the safety of others as defined by law.

One will be requested to sign a 'Discharge at Request' form prior to leaving the healthcare establishment. The healthcare provider cannot be held liable for any consequences arising from this course of action.

6. To withdraw the consent to any diagnostic or treatment procedures if one decides so after giving consent.
7. To receive a detailed explanation of the nature and consequences of any research or clinical trials that one might be invited to take part in, before it is conducted, and to obtain and document one's consent or refusal to participate.
8. To be informed and to be completely free of coercion in deciding whether to accept, decline, or withdraw, at any stage, to take part in clinical research or student training.

One has the responsibility:

1. To take an active part in discussions and decisions about one's healthcare and treatment.
2. To inform the healthcare provider of any changes in one's health condition.
3. To comply with the hospital/ward /unit rules and policies.
4. To follow the plan of care well. One is responsible for any decision and outcome if he/she decides not to follow the agreed advice or the recommended treatment.

PRINCIPLE 5: PRIVACY & CONFIDENTIALITY

The right to privacy and confidentiality.

One has the right:

1. To expect that one's privacy is respected when receiving healthcare according to the different circumstances. One is entitled to know what role each present individual has in one's care.
2. For all personal health information to be stored and processed in accordance with Art. 257 of the Criminal Code and the Data Protection Act.
3. To refuse consent for photos that need to be taken which may be used for teaching purposes or to guide clinical effectiveness.
4. To express the wish for personal health information not to be shared in particular ways such as with a family member.
5. To access one's own health records in accordance with the protocol set by the healthcare establishment.

One has the responsibility:

1. To ensure that health records are accurate and up-to-date. One should inform the healthcare providers of any changes in name, address, phone number or other details.
2. One has the responsibility to inform healthcare personnel if any information on one's health records is incorrect.
3. To help healthcare providers in safeguarding patient confidentiality by respecting the privacy of other service users.

PRINCIPLE 6: DIGNITY AND RESPECT

The right to be shown respect, dignity and consideration.

One has the right:

1. To be treated as an individual. One should expect that the healthcare provider demonstrates dignity, patience, empathy, tolerance and courtesy.
2. To receive care in a way that is respectful to one's age, colour, disability or illness, gender, marriage, civil partnership, maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation, nationality, or social status.
3. To be given time to decide about any examination or treatment without coercion from the healthcare providers. This is superseded in case of an emergency.
4. To expect to receive the necessary treatment to reduce suffering and pain in each phase of an illness.
5. To request spiritual and/or religious support when admitted into a healthcare establishment.
6. To expect an end of life care that is dignified, comforting and supporting relief from any unnecessary suffering.
7. To be constantly accompanied by someone of one's choice during an end of life situation, in accordance with the healthcare establishment's rules and policies.

One has the responsibility:

1. To treat healthcare staff and other patients, carers, and family members with dignity and respect.
2. Not to be violent or aggressive towards healthcare staff or other patients, their carers, and family members.
3. Not to subject any healthcare staff to any racial, sexual or any other kind of harassment or abuse.
4. To respect all ward policies and procedures.

PRINCIPLE 7: SAFETY

The right to safe and effective care.

One has the right:

1. To access health services and treatments that meet safety standards.
2. To expect that the care one receives will be free from harm resulting from the poor functioning of healthcare services, medical malpractice and error. Proper handover is pertinent to achieve a seamless and safe continuity of care between services.
3. To expect that any care and treatment received is provided by properly qualified and experienced staff.
4. To expect that the treatment is provided in an appropriate, safe and clean environment.
5. To expect that healthcare staff should always attend to hand hygiene prior to the initiation of any type of procedure.
6. To be free from restraints unless required for medical treatment or patient safety. This need should be frequently reviewed.
7. To expect that all healthcare establishments meet the required standards of hygiene as set by law and agreed by the National Health services in Malta.
8. To expect that every healthcare organisation is continuously amending and updating policies, regulations, providing training, and monitoring services to ensure that the patients are receiving the right quality of care in the safest manner possible.

One has the responsibility:

1. To forward any information related to the medicines one is taking to a healthcare professional.
2. To follow any advice one is given regarding medication and treatment.
3. To inform a healthcare professional about any known or possible allergies to any medicines, foods, and materials.
4. To finish any course of agreed treatment and to consult a doctor before deciding to change or stop any treatment.
5. Not to take any medication that is expired or prescribed for someone else.
6. To store medicines in an appropriate environment and in a safe place.
7. To use healthcare equipment only for its intended use.
8. To adhere to Infection Control policies in order to help prevent the spread of infections and diseases when someone is visiting or receiving care in any healthcare entity.

9. To attend to hand hygiene, before visiting a hospital ward.
10. To refrain from visiting patients in hospital if one is unwell.
11. To refrain from sitting on the bed of any patient if one is visiting someone in hospital.
12. To raise any concerns about the safety, effectiveness or cleanliness of services that may affect one's care.
13. To properly care for any equipment being used during a hospital stay or loaned at home for continuation of certain health related treatment and care. Any faulty equipment must be reported and returned immediately.

PRINCIPLE 8: COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS

The right to comment on care and pass constructive complaints.

One has the right:

1. To pass any feedback, suggestions and raise concerns or complaints as deemed necessary. This right is extended to significant others or carers who may also wish to provide feedback, comments or raise concerns. One should do this without any fear of retribution, compromise of access or quality of care.
2. To expect that feedback, complaints and suggestions are taken into consideration in order to improve health services.
3. To be given information and advice on how to give feedback and comment or raise concerns, or complaints about the care one has received and the services one has used.
4. To expect that any complaint made is dealt with efficiently and properly investigated in a timely manner.
5. To expect to be told what corrective action has been or will be taken as a result of the complaint made.

One has the responsibility:

1. To provide both positive and negative feedback about the care and treatment that one has received or about the health service in general. This gives healthcare providers the opportunity to improve healthcare provision.
2. To discuss any misunderstandings/ lack of understanding, of any kind through the appropriate channels.

CONCLUSION

The eight principles outlined in this patients' charter, are intended to be the tool that patients refer to, to know what their rights are, but also to be aware of what their duties and responsibilities are while making use of the various healthcare services available within the Public Health system. It also focuses on a patient centered approach and promotes patient participation as a key priority. It acknowledges patients as individuals with diverse needs and not just a medical condition that needs to be treated. The charter empowers patients and future service users to demand quality services from all healthcare providers. It also allows patients, relatives and staff to share an understanding of the rights and responsibilities of people receiving care. Finally, it is intended to assist stakeholders to work together towards achieving the best outcomes within a relationship that provides a streamlined service to all the patients making use of the different healthcare services provided within our health system.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information about the Cross Border Directive one can contact the **Malta National Contact Point** on:

Email: crossborderhealth@gov.mt

Telephone: 00356 21224071 22992381 Website: <https://health.gov.mt/en/cbhc/Pages/Cross-Border.aspx>

For more information about the rights of persons with mental disorders one can contact the **Office of the Commissioner for Mental Health** on:

Address: St Luke's Square, G'Mangia, PTA 1010

Email: mentalhealthcommissioner.mfh@gov.mt;

Telephone: 00356 25924304

Website: <http://commissionermhop.gov.mt>

If one wishes to present a complaint to the **Environmental Health Directorate** one can contact them on:

Address: Continental Business Centre, Cutrico Buildings, Level 1, Old Railway Track, Santa Venera.

Email: mhi@gov.mt

Telephone: 00356 21337333

Website: https://ehealth.gov.mt/HealthPortal/public_health/environmental-health/department_for_env_health.aspx

Constructive feedback and complaints can also be forwarded to the Healthcare Standards Directorate on healthstandards.sph@gov.mt