

Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses Congrégation chrétienne des Témoins de Jéhovah



PO Box/C. P. 4100, Georgetown, Ontario L7G 4Y4, Canada
Telephone/Téléphone: 905-873-4100 Fax/Télécopieur: 905-873-4554

December 11, 2011

TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS

Re: Arrangements for those who must travel to seek care for special medical needs

Dear Brothers:

At times, our brothers require specialized medical care that is unavailable locally. Nearby medical facilities may not be equipped to provide nonblood medical care or are unwilling to care for patients who refuse blood transfusions. Occasionally, our brothers seek elective, quality medical care at a more economical rate elsewhere, or they face an emergency while away from home. In these situations, the Hospital Liaison Committees (HLCs) may be of assistance.

A new form entitled *Special Medical Needs Room Request (hlc-20)* has been made available to HLCs. This form allows Witness patients and family to request assistance with lodging during their stay. Of course, there is no obligation for patients to use this provision, especially when financial circumstances allow the patient to cover his needs personally. If the patient simply wants information on what accommodation options are available locally, he may indicate that he is able to cover such expenses and the HLC can then provide such information.

For patients needing assistance in nonemergency situations, the elders should obtain the form from the local HLC, gather the necessary information, assist the publisher or his family to fill it out, and *promptly* send it to the destination HLC (that is, the HLC in the city where the patient will receive care). In this way, the destination HLC can plan accordingly. (Please note that in emergency situations, filling out the form may not be practical. You may contact the HLC for other options in expediting such requests.)

When a patient seeks nonblood medical care, the elders may contact the HLC at the request of the patient or his family. The HLC can provide information regarding local facilities or doctors offering nonblood medical care. If no options are available locally, the HLC will contact the branch office for further assistance. The HLC can also assist if a person is visiting from another country and suffers an accident. As a reminder, all should carry their *Advance Medical Directive* (AMD) card when traveling.—See the article “New Provision to Assist Us to Abstain From Blood” in the December 2004 issue of *Our Kingdom Ministry*, page 7.

Accommodations: If travel is necessary, it is wise for families to limit the size of the group traveling with the patient. In most cases, the spaces on the *Special Medical Needs Room Request (hlc-20)* form (which has room for three persons besides the patient) should suffice. The destination HLC will use the completed form to locate lodging for the group. Accommodations may be arranged in the following ways:

- (a) Standing agreements that hospitals have negotiated with nearby hotels or private residential facilities for discounted rates. (Since this is an arrangement made by the hospital, it would be available to anyone.)
- (b) Discounted rooms for Witnesses at local hotels used in connection with circuit events and district conventions may be available in some circumstances.
- (c) Private homes of Witness families living near the medical facility. (If accommodations are required for an extended period of time, the homes of multiple families may be used on a rotating basis so as not to impose a burden on any one family.)

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If a non-Witness relative or a disfellowshipped family member is accompanying the Witness patient, no special arrangements or rates (outlined in points b and c above) would be extended beyond accommodations for the patient and immediate family members in good standing.

Cost: It should be noted that the patient and his family have the primary obligation to care for the cost incurred for lodging, transportation, and meals as well as other related expenses. (1 Tim. 5:8) However, the patient's congregation may also be able to offer assistance in certain cases, in harmony with what is stated in the *Organized* book on pages 131-133, under the subheading "Caring for the Poor." Congregation elders should consider the circumstances and spiritual standing of the patient and his family to determine what assistance would be appropriate.

The patient should also give attention to the cost of the medical treatment. In some cases, the destination HLC may be able to determine the approximate cost of a medical procedure. More often, however, the doctor can ascertain this information for the patient or the family. The patient should investigate what portions of his medical treatment will be covered by insurance.

The arrangement of staying in private homes outlined above is an evidence of self-sacrificing love, a quality for which Jehovah's people are well-known. (Prov. 3:27; Rom. 12:13; Heb. 13:1, 2) It would be inappropriate to expect that hospitable brothers should bear the costs associated with the personal medical care of another. Therefore, publishers and their immediate family should be careful to avoid any abuse of this loving arrangement. If the treatment is elective, publishers would especially want to count the cost of the medical treatment as well as the associated expenses so as to not place a burden on fellow Christians.—Luke 14:28.

We use this occasion to send you an expression of our warm Christian love and greetings.

Your brothers,

*Christian Congregation
of Jehovah's Witnesses*

cc: Hospital Liaison Committees
Traveling overseers

PS to Congregation Service Committee:

If your congregation is near a medical facility where patients from other areas may seek medical care, please consult with family heads in your congregation who may be able to accommodate out-of-town patients. If some are willing to make their home available, then details should be conveyed to the local HLC chairman. When a need arises, the HLC or Patient Visitation Group (PVG) will be able to contact the householders to determine if they can render assistance.

When seeking medical care for children, parents should be reminded of the information found in *How Parents Can Protect Their Children From Misuse of Blood* (S-55). Even experienced physicians who are cooperative are unable to give 100-percent assurance that donor blood will not be used in treating children, infants, or premature babies. Nonetheless, a cooperative doctor may assure parents that he will do everything to avoid blood transfusion in a treatment or a procedure. With such assurance, parents may decide that this is their best option and allow the physician to care for the treatment.

PS to secretary:

This letter should be retained in the congregation permanent file of policy letters. You may wish to update the congregation copy of *Index to Letters—For Bodies of Elders* (S-22) at this time as well.