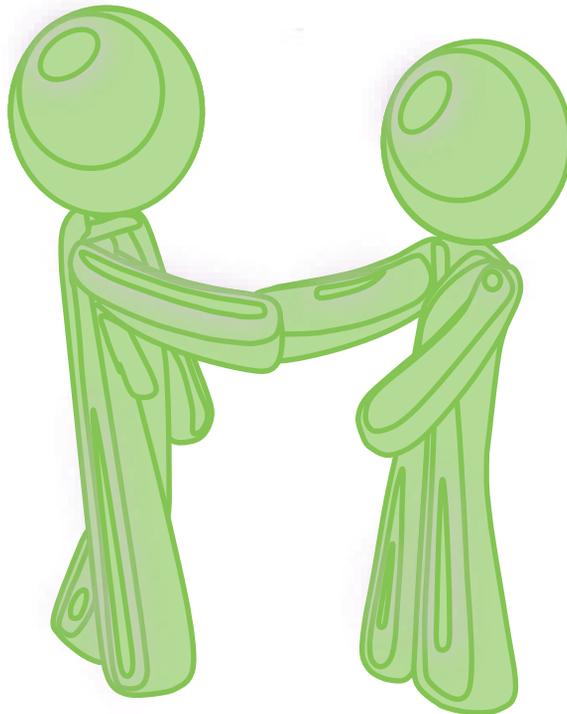


# Boundaries: Keeping You and Others Safe



**For volunteers who have roles  
on our Inpatient Unit**

## Introduction

Thames Hospice has developed this guidance brochure for volunteers on 'Boundaries'. This version is especially for volunteers who have roles on our Inpatient Unit.

Boundaries are important. Think of your home or garden and what separates 'your space' from 'your neighbour's space'. This physical boundary helps you both to know what belongs to each of you and invites you to relate well and live respectfully within that boundary.

Professional boundaries in healthcare settings are similar. They make clear what is appropriate and what is not appropriate when helping patients made vulnerable by their condition or circumstances, and when supporting their partners or family members.

Professional boundaries are the mutually understood, physical and emotional limits of the relationship between the patient/partner/family member and the hospice volunteer.

### **Professional boundaries help to keep our volunteers safe by:**

- clarifying the parameters and standards of acceptable behaviour;
- giving volunteers clarity and confidence with how to react in different situations;
- helping to ensure that volunteers are not taken advantage of;
- reducing role-related stress by separating volunteering from our private lives.

### **Professional boundaries help to keep patients/partners/family members safe by:**

- protecting them from inappropriate behaviours;
- preventing them from becoming dependant or too involved with a volunteer;
- enabling them to expect and receive consistent and high standards of help;
- building for them healthy and appropriate lines of rapport, care and trust.

## WHAT is a boundary?

**A perimeter:** knowing the land and the limits of your role.

**A dividing line:** knowing what is okay and what is not okay in your communications, care and support.

**Can sometimes be difficult to see or define:** Knowing the distinction between okay/not okay, appropriate/inappropriate, right/wrong may not always be crystal-clear. We provide this brochure to help you in keeping yourself and others safe.

## WHY do we need boundaries?

At Thames Hospice, boundaries help us provide the safest care possible between the Thames Hospice worker (staff and volunteers) and the patient/partner/family member.

We work very hard to ensure that all the care and support we provide is safe. We keep things safe and supportive by knowing and following professional boundaries.

Boundaries help to keep volunteers safe: they provide clarity as to what is appropriate in the role, which can build confidence; they can also protect the volunteer from being manipulated or exploited; for example, by someone who may be seeking healthcare information or personal contact details for deceitful reasons.

Boundaries help to keep patients/partners/family members safe: they protect them from inappropriate or harmful behaviours by volunteers; they can also prevent them from becoming dependant or too closely involved with a volunteer.

### *Example*

A volunteer got to know a patient solely through their volunteer role at the Hospice. The volunteer decided to visit the discharged patient at home without the knowledge of their manager or nursing staff.

### *Outcome*

The volunteer was unwittingly in danger as there was a member of the household present who had been abusive and violent to healthcare professionals visiting the home on previous occasions.

### *Solution*

Staff and volunteers should stay within the boundaries of their role to maintain a professional relationship.

## WHO needs to know and follow boundaries?

All staff members at Thames Hospice have boundaries in the work they do. Doctors, nurses, counsellors, therapists, administrators, fundraisers, and all other people employed here, have contractual agreements about the work they do, alongside some clearly defined boundaries to that work. For example, a nurse must not visit or make contact with a patient while off duty. That would be unsafe and unprofessional practice, and it creates misunderstandings in the mind of a vulnerable patient. Boundaries ensure that the work is sound, safe and supported.

All volunteers must also adhere to boundaries in the contribution they make within their roles throughout Thames Hospice. For example, if a visiting partner of a patient starts asking a volunteer “are you married?”, or “what’s your phone number?”, or “where do you live?”, it is important that the volunteer does not share such personal information that could foster an unhealthy form of interest, contact or relationship outside of the essential role.

## HOW is a caring/therapeutic relationship different from a social relationship?

Social relationships are casual, friendly or romantic. A social relationship also is for the mutual interest of both people involved. However, a caring or therapeutic relationship is solely in the interests of the patient/partner/family member.

Sometimes, it can be difficult to know where to draw the line. One thing to keep in the forefront of our mind is that we are intervening among patients/partners/family members to assist them with issues related to the patient’s illness/admission.

## WHERE are the boundary lines in these different areas?

### Time and Place:

Each volunteer has a designated volunteering shift. These are the hours when you are on duty as a volunteer in your area of involvement. There is no need to come into your area of involvement outside of your designated shift. We work as a team. Other volunteers and staff members will be fulfilling their duties while you are off duty. Do not come in when you are off duty to say ‘goodbye’ to a patient who is being discharged. If you think there is an exceptional reason why you need to come into that area outside of your designated volunteering shift, you must first make your request known to your manager or, if unavailable, a senior nurse.

The place of your volunteering is within the confines of Thames Hospice at Bray Lake. You must not extend the support you give to a patient or family member at their home, in their car or at any other location.

### Counselling:

Volunteers will try to build a good rapport with patients and those closest to them. However, be careful if professional advice or counselling is being sought. Thames Hospice has a professional counselling team. It is wise to refer all such requests from patients and family members for counselling to a senior nurse, your manager or directly to the counselling team. Do not provide counselling yourself.

## **Social:**

Being engaged in therapeutic activities with patients/partners/family members during your designated volunteering shift is fine, provided it is clear that this is part of your volunteering role.

Socialising with patients/partners/family members outside of your designated volunteering shift blurs the private and professional roles. It can lead to all kinds of problems such as maintaining confidentiality, the breakdown of professional boundaries and it runs the risk of allegations being made against the volunteer.

Sexual relations between volunteers and patients/partners/family members is unacceptable. A sexual relationship with someone who is deemed vulnerable would be seen as an abuse of power and would lead to safeguarding and legal processes.

Volunteering enhances the therapeutic and supportive work of the hospice; it is friendly but it is different to friendship. We are required to separate our volunteering from our private life so that we can support patients/partners/family members in a different way to other people in their lives.

Social Media is a big presence in the lives of many. Volunteers must not add ('like') clients to personal Social Media pages. Thames Hospice itself has a Social Media presence but individuals must not blur professional and personal boundaries in any Social Media channels.

## **Communications:**

You will be in breach of the Data Protection Act if you give out information regarded as personal and identifiable information about other colleagues (staff, volunteers) or about patients and their families. You must not talk to your friends and families about patients and their families. Please respect people's right to have their personal and sensitive data held securely and confidentially. Please treat their data as you would want your own to be treated.

Volunteers should never disclose their own personal telephone numbers/email addresses/Social Media profiles to patients/partners/family members. This blurs and erodes the lines of professional and private lives. It can lead to unhealthy perceptions and frequent contact outside of volunteering shifts, creating stress for both the volunteer and patient/partner/family member.

If a patient asks you to let their partner/family member know they are okay, ask a staff member to do this for them. Do not use their phone to call or send a message – and do not use your own phone to do this. This is not your responsibility and the information you give at that time could change very quickly.

If you communicate with other TH colleagues (staff or volunteers) via a WhatsApp group, you must never include names or information about a TH patient or family member which identifies that person or their condition or reason for being admitted.

Do not seek unnecessary information from the patient/partner/family member that is not relevant to the requirements of your role. Do not ask intrusive questions such as: 'What are you in here for?'; 'What's wrong with you?'; 'How old are you?'; 'Are you gay?'; 'How much money do you have?'

### **Example**

A patient became personally close to a volunteer. The patient asked the volunteer where they lived and found out their surname and phone number. The patient then started to phone the volunteer at home.

### **Outcome**

The volunteer felt uncomfortable as their personal and private space had been intruded.

### **Solution**

Be vague about where you live and do not disclose your personal contact details.

## **Complaints:**

If you have a complaint or grievance about Thames Hospice or about any aspect of your volunteering role, do not share this with a patient/partner/family member or colleague but take it to your manager to be resolved.

If a patient/partner/family member has a complaint or grievance, please disclose this to a senior nurse or your manager.

## **Financial:**

Giving or receiving gifts blurs boundaries and may give the impression of favouritism or the development of a personal friendship/relationship. Receiving gifts from patients/partners/family members may also raise their expectations of the level of support you can provide. It may be appropriate to receive a small gift where declining it will cause offence, but this must always be discussed with your line manager or a senior nurse on duty.

Do not buy anything from or sell anything to patients/partners/family members. Do not use their money or credit card to buy goods for them. This can complicate matters and could potentially expose you to allegations of financial abuse if a partner or family member considers the transaction unfair.

Do not lend to or borrow from a patient/partner/family member. Pressure for the return of a borrowed item or borrowed money could put strain on the relationship and adversely impact the work we do.

## Legal:

Thames Hospice has a duty to safeguard our patients. Unfortunately, financial abuse of vulnerable people is a known common occurrence.

Thames Hospice volunteers and members of staff must not witness the signing of a Lasting Power of Attorney for any of our patients/partners/family members. You must inform your manager if you have been asked to act as a Power of Attorney for any of our patients/partners/family members.

Volunteers and members of staff must not witness the signing of a will for any of our patients/partners/family members. You must inform your manager if you have been named as an Executor or as a beneficiary in a will of one of our patients/partners/family members.

Thames Hospice has to investigate all known instances where a volunteer is named as a beneficiary in a will, as an Executor of a will, or as a Power of Attorney to ascertain that no financial coercion has occurred and that no boundaries have been breached.

## Funerals:

Thames Hospice does not send a representative to each funeral of the many hundreds of patients we care for each year. Please do not attend a funeral uninvited. If you are invited to attend the funeral of a patient, and wish to do so, you should first check with your manager.

### Example

A volunteer decides to attend the funeral of a patient they had supported and grew fond of.

### Outcome

At the end of the funeral service, a family member berates the volunteer for attending, saying 'We wanted to celebrate a life that was lived but you being here reminds us of the dying...'

### Solution

Avoid attending a funeral uninvited. Be mindful that your rapport with a patient is not the same as that with the patient's family. Talk with your manager.

## **WHEN might we need to report that a boundary line has been crossed?**

If you see signs of unacceptable behaviour (e.g., racism) by a colleague (staff, volunteer), or if you witness that a boundary has been breached, you are encouraged to challenge them. Please challenge the person's action rather than the person themselves. If you feel uncomfortable challenging a colleague, report the occurrence to your manager, a senior nurse or the Head of Volunteering.

Volunteers who breach the guidance contained in this document will be challenged; they may be engaged in the processes set out in Thames Hospice policies and role agreements. If unacceptable behaviour continues, volunteers may be asked to leave volunteering with Thames Hospice for the protection of the patient/family member, the volunteer themselves and the charity's reputation.