

NURSING SERVICE GUIDELINES INPATIENT BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Guideline: Body and belongings search



Policy Number Superseded:

Responsibility: Department directors/lead nurses/floor nurses/designees

Effective Date:
February 2025

Purpose of Guideline: To provide a safe and therapeutic environment that remains free of contraband. All patients and their belongings will be searched thoroughly by staff. This search will be completed without a physician's order to assure the safety of the unit. This will be completed at admission and anytime new items are received on the unit during the patient's continued inpatient stay.

Initial Effective Date:
January 2020

Procedure:

- (A) All patients and their belongings will be searched upon admission.
 - (1) Staff will explain to the patient what you are doing and why.
 - (2) Explain where items will be stored and what they will have access to.
 - (3) Search will be done in a professional manner, maintaining privacy and dignity.

- (B) Staff will fill out patient belongings sheet and have patient or guardian sign. All items will be listed on this form. Staff will ask patient's family/guardian to take home all items that are not needed. A new form will be completed anytime additional items are received on the unit.
 - (1) Wallets, money, and valuables should be sent back home with family/guardian when possible. If not possible, then they will be placed in valuables envelope and sent to security for lock up.

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- (2) Medications brought from home should be sent back home with family/guardian when possible. If not possible, then they are to be sent to the pharmacy to be stored until discharge.
 - (3) If any hazardous or illegal materials/substances are found during search, staff will notify security/campus police immediately (ex: weapons/guns, street drugs). Also, refer to [policy 3364-120-70 Search, Seizure and Disposition of Drugs, Weapons and Potentially Harmful Items](#).
- (C) Patients will not be allowed to keep in their possession any unsafe items including, but not limited to, cell phones, electronic devices, vape pens, lighters, pens, pencils, shoelaces, belts, and clothing that contains strings. Other clothing items that are prohibited include hoodies, hats, or clothing with inappropriate graphics/wording/slogans or that is provocative/revealing.
- (D) All belongings that are not allowed on the unit will be sent home with family or secured in a storage bin and locked in the storage room until discharge.
- (E) All items that are permitted on the unit, such as clothing/personal hygiene items, will be placed in patient storage locker/closet on the unit and provided for the patient during designated times.
- (F) Patients are responsible for all items in their possession.
- (G) At time of discharge, stored items will be returned to the patient. Inpatient psychiatry units will not be responsible for any belongings lost or left behind.
- (H) Belongings left after patient is discharged:
- (1) Belongings should be bagged and marked with patient information.
 - (2) Inform patient/representative that they may pick up belongings within 30 days after discharge.
 - (3) Items may be disposed of by staff, if not picked up within the time frame.
 - (4) Under rare conditions, UPMC staff will mail personal items to discharged patients.
- (I) Body search process.
- (1) Staff must wear gloves.

- (2) For a comprehensive list of all items considered to be prohibited/contraband, please refer to the guideline titled [Unit Contraband](#).
 - (3) Searches should be conducted by staff of same sex, if possible. Two staff will be present during searches if clinically indicated.
 - (4) Prior to patient coming onto the unit, search will be conducted by staff by first removing all items from patient and searching those belongings. Staff is to remain with patient until after the contraband search is completed.
 - (5) Upon arrival, patients are to remove all their clothing including shoes/socks/underwear, and change into a hospital gown or hospital pj's. Staff will then search all the clothing removed from the patient and search the room in which the patient changed clothing (ex: bathroom in the entry of the unit).
 - (6) Staff will use a metal detector and wand over the patient. The patient will extend arms out, spread legs apart and staff will move wand approximately 1 inch from patient's body to cover all the patient's surfaces. Patient will be asked to squat and move hair around as needed.
 - (7) Staff will only pat down a patient if there is evidence of a foreign body present. Staff will not ever touch or pat any private areas of the patient. Staff will have a witness present during this portion of the search if there is a need for the patient to be touched.
 - (8) After staff determines no contraband is present, the patient can get dressed in their own clothes again.
 - (9) After all other allowed items are searched, they can be returned to the patient. All items that are not allowed on the unit will be locked up as stated in section (D) above.
- (J) Belongings search process.
- (1) Staff must wear gloves.
 - (2) Check lining of bags, suitcases, and purses for contraband.

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- (3) Clothing is to be unfolded and checked carefully, pockets turned inside out, hems checked, zippers are to be unzipped. Drawstrings removed or cannot be used by patient.
- (4) No belts, shoelaces, hoodies, or drawstrings allowed on unit. No underwire bras.
- (5) Check inside the shoes, laces removed. Socks turned inside out.
- (6) Open toiletry containers, cosmetic cases and check thoroughly. No mirrors allowed.
- (7) Be aware of items that may contain alcohol (mouthwash, hygiene items), as these are prohibited on the unit.

Approved by:
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Chief Nursing Officer

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