

Patient and Belongings Search (weapons, drugs)

[Hospital] Policy

Title:	Patient and Belongings Search
Department:	Workplace Violence Prevention Committee
Approved By:	Workplace Violence Prevention Committee
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Key Words: search, belongings, contraband, weapons, drugs

POLICY STATEMENT:

To maintain the safety of the care environment, there are circumstances under which patients, patient's personal belongings and/or visitors, may be searched within a healthcare organization. This policy outlines the steps to be taken to protect the patient's privacy and patient and staff safety. It also describes the process for handling prohibited items (e.g., weapons (legal/illegal) or other harmful objects including illegal controlled substances) that are discovered in a patient's possession.

PURPOSE:

To provide circumstances and procedures for conducting patient and visitor searches at [Hospital].

SCOPE:

This policy applies to patients in all areas of the main campus except the N5 inpatient location and to all patient visitors. See policy "Search of Persons and Belongings N5 Unit" for inpatient behavioral health patients on the N5 DMH licensed unit. This policy does not apply to [Hospital] locations external to the main hospital campus due to the use of Security which is not present in these locations.

DEFINITIONS:

Contraband: Any item that is banned from the hospital and/or is of harm to the patient or others. Items include but are not limited to: guns, knives, ammunition, chemical

substances, illegal drugs or drug paraphernalia, lighters and other items that pose safety or risk as determined by leadership.

Reasonable belief: sufficient basis to search

PROCEDURE:

Search Criteria for Visitors

1. Call Security if there is a reasonable belief that the visitor has contraband including:
 - a) a weapon, harmful object, illicit drugs or
 - b) hospital property
2. A search of a package brought in by a visitor is justified upon reasonable belief that it contains contraband. If a visitor refuses, visitation may be terminated.
3. If it is suspected that a visitor is bringing illegal drugs into the hospital for the patient's use (e.g., the patient exhibits behavioral changes consistent with drug use after a visit) then visitors may be restricted or barred.

Search Criteria for Patients

1. The patient's general right to privacy gives way to the hospital's medical care obligation if the patient engages in a course of action that:
 - a) is harmful to him or herself,
 - b) is harmful to others (patients, visitors, or hospital staff), or
 - c) may directly affect the medical care given to the patient.
2. A patient search is justified upon reasonable belief that the patient has:
 - a) medication or drugs the hospital has not prescribed
 - b) contraband (e.g. alcohol, drugs, drug paraphernalia)
 - c) a weapon or a harmful object
 - d) unauthorized hospital property in their possession with intent to leave the premises
 - e) another person's property
3. Ambulatory Care sites off of main hospital campus will not conduct search of patients. When concerns exist, patients will be asked to leave. 911 will be called if patients are non-compliant with requests.

Prior to conducting the search, the following steps should be taken:

1. Call Security immediately if there is concern that a weapon (legal/illegal) or other harmful object is present; and/or when concern regarding illegal controlled substance(s) is present.
2. Clinical staff (RN/Provider/LIP) will discuss with the patient the reason for search. The patient will be asked for permission to search their belongings including bedside stand, purse, suitcase, pockets, etc.
3. The patient must be asked to give permission for a search of their person.
4. A female staff member must be present when searching female patients.
5. If the patient refuses but the need to search remains; the search will be carried out upon the written order of a Provider/LIP. The Nurse Director or Manager/ Nursing Supervisor, Provider and Security are notified prior to search. At a minimum, the Nurse and Security will be present for the search following written order.

NOTE: If consultation with legal Counsel is required, call the Department Director or the Nursing Supervisor to coordinate with Risk Management.

Procedure	Process Steps	Points of Emphasis
Belongings Searches-All Locations		
Any Risk conditions is met- Personal Belongings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patient’s personal property is searched in the presence of at least one staff member (may be a security officer) and in the presence of the patient, whenever possible. • Ask patient if there is anything sharp, or potentially dangerous in their belongings • A belongings list is completed • Any contraband removed is documented and secured by Security 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff wears safety/search gloves during any search procedure. • To ensure staff safety, it is recommended that staff do not reach inside any patient belongings that can’t be visualized. Instead these items will be removed and secured. • Belongings will be emptied out completely and searched where staff have full ability to visualize all contents. • Items which may conceal contraband must be searched (e.g. eyeglass cases, cell phone cases/covers; iPod cases, books, linings of wallets) • Consider not returning coats and shoes to patients when

		certain risk conditions are met (i.e. elopement risk).
Room Search-All Locations		
Any Risk condition is met- Room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patient's room is searched in the presence of at least one staff member and a security officer and in the presence of the patient, whenever possible. • Any contraband removed is documented and secured by Security • Document the rationale and results of the search in the medical record 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff wears gloves during any search procedure. • A complete search includes but is not limited to the bathroom, mattress, pillows, closet, drawers, clothing, ceiling tiles if the tiles are removable, etc. • In double occupancy rooms, documentation of the search will be completed for both patients occupying the room.
Personal Searches-All Locations		
Voluntary Disrobing-Cooperative Patient	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occurs in a private area in the presence of at least two staff members (one may be a security officer) whenever possible • Patients are asked to empty all pockets, remove clothing including underwear, shoes and socks, and dress in hospital clothing • Search the patient's clothing • Document the search in the medical record 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff wears gloves during any search procedure. • Snap hospital gowns will be used for patients identified as a risk
Voluntary Non-Disrobing-Patient who Refuses to Disrobe but will cooperate with a Search	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patient is searched in the presence of at least one staff member and a security officer. • Patients are asked to empty all pockets, turn their pockets inside out, remove shoes, socks and outerwear • Security performs 'pat down' of the patient • Security may perform a metal detector wand search of the patient. • Document the search in the medical record 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff wears gloves during any search procedure. • The use of a metal detector wand by Security is in no way intended to replace any other aspects of the search. There are 3 metal detector wands: ED, N5 and Security Office locations.