

HOSPITAL Manual

TITLE: Search of Patient's Belongings

POLICY: #

PURPOSE: To provide a safe environment for patients who may be at risk of causing substantial harm to self or others; to provide guidelines for searching patient rooms/belongings or search of person; to provide guidelines for removing potentially harmful objects or substances.

POLICY: Either the LIP or the nurse, in consultation with the nursing supervisor (when available), may authorize the search and/or removal of patient belongings if it is determined to be necessary in order to safeguard the patient and environment of care.

NOTE: If it is clinically determined that the patient is at risk to harm them self or others, a belongings search can be authorized/conducted even if the patient refuses to consent to the search. Protecting the life of the patient and those in the environment of care overrides the patient's right to privacy. When necessary, consult Psychiatry; however, the search may be conducted prior to consultation with Psychiatry if deemed appropriate by staff providing care to the patient.

IMPLEMENTATION:

Guidelines for a Search:

- Searches are conducted to preserve the health, safety and welfare of the patients and staff.
- Searches will not be without reasonable cause
- The scope and method of the search must be related to the objectives of the search and not be more intrusive than is necessary for the hospital to enforce its rule.

The search and/or removal of a patient's belongings (or search of the patient's room when appropriate) is required with the following circumstances:

1. The patient is on suicide/self-harm precautions
2. The patient is deemed potentially homicidal and/or violent.
3. The patient appears to be under the influence of alcohol or other substances and is exhibiting impaired judgment and behavior, as determined by the staff providing treatment.

NOTE: If necessary, a required search/removal may be ordered by a LIP for reasons other than those listed above.

The LIP and/or the nurse shall inform the patient of the need for the search. Every effort shall be made to obtain consent from the patient in order to perform the safety search without conflict.

The search is conducted in order to ensure a safe environment of care by removing potentially harmful objects and/or substances. When applicable, patient belongings can be sent home with an individual designated by the patient. If the belongings cannot be sent home, and are considered valuable, the patient should be given the option to have their valuables secured in a locked storage space.

Whenever possible, the patient should be present when a search is being conducted. During the search, there should be a minimum of two hospital staff on scene.

There are two types of searches:

1. Search of patient's room and possessions – May be authorized by a LIP or a nurse when clinical staff have reason to believe that a patient has any potentially hazardous items in his/her room.

The search shall include a thorough inventory of the room and the patient's belongings including suitcases, purses, and bags.

2. Search of the person- An external search of the patient may be authorized by a LIP or a nurse. This may involve having the patient empty the contents of his/her pockets and turn them inside out.

PROCEDURE:

1. Any harmful or potentially harmful objects should be labeled and placed in locked storage in the Security Office until either the patient is discharged or a person designated by the patient removes the items.
2. Labeled prescription medications and/or clean, unused prescription syringes, shall be placed in an envelope, labeled and stored in the Hospital Pharmacy until:
 - a. A family member is able to take the medication home
 - b. A LIP orders that the medications be discarded
 - c. The patient is discharged at which time the medication shall be returned to the patient.
3. Drugs or substances that are unlabeled, illegal or suspected of being illegal shall be handled in the following manner:
 - a. pills/liquids will be destroyed using the Pharmaceutical Waste Destroyer
 - b. disposal/destruction of such medication shall be done in the presence of 2 clinicians or 1 clinician and a Security Officer.
 - c. Any powdered substance should be kept sealed. The Security Department will contact the Needham Police Department for disposal.
4. **If it is known (or there is suspicion) that the patient has a weapon/firearm in their possession, but is not actively threatening harm to themselves or others, contact the Security Department via pager XXXX** (Reference the "Possession and Handling of Firearms and Dangerous Weapons on Hospital Property,)
5. **If the patient is threatening harm with a weapon/firearm, immediately dial 9-911 to request a law enforcement response, then dial XXXX to initiate a WEAPONS THREAT emergency code response (Reference the "Weapons Related Response Plan")**

Sponsor:

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