

SEARCHING PATIENTS' BELONGINGS

PRACTICE GUIDELINE[®]

DOCUMENT SUMMARY/KEY POINTS

This guideline has been developed following consultation with the Legal Branch of the NSW Ministry of Health and in the absence of a pre-existing document pertaining to searching patients in a health setting.

- In order to provide a safe environment for young people at risk of harming themselves and/ or others, searches of patients may sometimes need to be conducted to remove any items of potential harm.
- Patients and their belongings may need to be searched at admission and other times if their behaviour or mental state worsens.
- It is a condition of patient leave off the ward that both the patient and their carer agree to not bring prohibited items back to the ward and agree to have belongings searched by staff on their return.
- Ideally consent should be obtained from their carer and the patient.
- If consent is unable to be obtained, a search may proceed if there is a reasonable suspicion that not doing so could place staff or patients at serious risk.
- The procedure **MUST** be carried out by two staff members with the dignity and privacy of the young person a prime consideration at all times.
- If possible the search should be carried out with the patient and their carer present.
- This document lists items of potential harm and instructions on how to conduct a search.

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| Approved by: | SCHN Policy, Procedure and Guideline Committee | |
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| Team Leader: | Staff Specialist Psychiatry | Area/Dept: Hall Ward, CHW |

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This Guideline may be varied, withdrawn or replaced at any time.

Guidelines on Searching Patients' Belongings

Introduction

In order to provide a safe environment for young people at risk of harming themselves and/or others, searches of patients and their belongings may sometimes need to be conducted to remove any items of potential harm.

This procedure **MUST** be carried out by two staff members. Ideally a search should be conducted with consent of the patient and their carer, and in their presence. The dignity and privacy of the young person must always be considered. If consent is unable to be obtained the safety of the patient and others needs to be protected and this may override issues of consent.

On some occasions it may be appropriate for the young person to have another support person present during the procedure (eg Social Worker). The procedure should be explained in a non-threatening and calm manner and should be conducted in a private area.

The following guidelines should be followed:

1. The reason for searching the patient and their belongings must be fully explained to the young person and family members.
2. The young person should be asked to empty their pockets and bags voluntarily wherever possible. The personal belongings deemed unsafe are to be taken home by family/ carers, unless legal intervention is warranted. (See [Guidelines for Management of Suspected Illicit or Unidentified Substances](#)).
3. Extreme care should be taken to avoid injury from sharp objects.
4. Principles of standard precautions should be applied during search procedures of persons and property e.g. gloves should be worn where deemed necessary.
5. In difficult situations such as a patient refusing to consent to a search, the nursing Team Leader should seek advice/ assistance from the Nursing Line Manager or the appropriate Medical Officer.
6. A search may need to take place at times other than admission, not limited to, but including when:
 - i. A young person's mental state or behaviour has deteriorated;
 - ii. Concerns for the safety of the patients and/or others has increased;
 - iii. Information or observations have led staff to reasonably suspect that prohibited items are present on the ward.
7. Any items removed need to be recorded in the patient's medical record and/or the "Hall Ward (CHW) /Saunders Ward (SCH) Patients' Belongings Register".
8. Removed items should be identified (if possible) and safely stored. If indicated they may temporarily be stored in the Hall/Saunders ward safe (refer to [Management of Illicit or unidentified Substances policy](#)) until:
 - i. Items reportable to the Police are removed by the Police or
 - ii. Items that don't need to be reported to the Police are removed by the parent/ carer or taken home by the patient at discharge.

The following items are NOT permitted in SCHN:

- Alcohol,
- cigarettes and
- other illicit substances

Refer to [Illicit, Suspected or Unidentified Substances: Management Practice Guideline](#) for instructions on what to do with these items if found.

The following items are NOT permitted in Hall/Saunders Ward:

- Belts, drawstring pants, hooded jumpers or tops
- Any implement that has the potential to be used as a weapon including all cutlery and metal items such as needles and pins
- Glass items
- Hair dryers, hair straighteners, curling wands
- Lighters/ matches
- Medications
- Metal nail files
- Plastic bags
- Products in aluminium cans or bottles, aerosol cans
- Razors
- Sharp implements e.g. maths compass, scissors, sharpeners, metal coat hangers
- No electronic/digital devices or electrical appliances including Mobile phones, computers/laptops, CD players or MP3 players
- Food other than that supplied by the hospital, unless specifically authorised by a patient's AMO

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