

Handling patient valuables on a psychiatric unit

Introduction

As on all other hospital units, patients are discouraged from bringing expensive items, such as jewelry, large amounts of money, and designer handbags or coats, with them to a psychiatric unit. An exception to the rule may be engagement and wedding rings; however, the patient is usually encouraged to have a family member take them home or to secure them in the facility safe until discharge. Most psychiatric units lack a place for patients to lock up their possessions, and the unit isn't a safe place to keep such valuables.

Some psychiatric units will allow patients to keep a small amount of money (usually no more than \$20) with them for use in the hospital gift shop and cafeteria. Credit cards, debit cards, or bank checks shouldn't remain with the patient on the unit.

Some facilities allow patients to keep their wallets or purse with them, even though these articles may contain identification such as a driver's license. The patient is usually encouraged to allow such items to be secured according to facility policy until he's discharged because of the risk of identity theft.

Most psychiatric units don't allow patients to have cellular telephones on the unit. Cell phones with camera features make patient confidentiality impossible. On most units patients may not keep their electronic personal data organizers, laptop computers, or their music or game players. Your facility policy should state exactly what isn't allowed on the unit so that the patient's personal electronic devices don't become an issue between staff and the patient.

Equipment

- Personal property form
- Valuables envelopes or plastic or paper bags
- Labels with the patient's name and identification number

Implementation

1. Confirm the patient's identity using two patient identifiers according to your facility's policy.¹
2. Review the patient's valuables section of the facility handbook with the patient, if one is available.
3. Ask the patient if he has any valuables with him.
4. Inspect the patient's belongings per facility policy.
5. Advise the patient to have a family member or friend take all valuables home, including jewelry, money, credit cards, clothing, and electronics *because the psychiatric unit may not be able to adequately protect or store such items.*
6. If the patient wants to keep his valuables in the facility, place them in valuables envelopes or bags, label them with the patient's name and identification number, and place them in your facility's designated secure area or the facility safe.
7. Inform the patient that his valuables will be returned to him when he's discharged.

8. If the patient insists on keeping jewelry, money, credit cards, or personal identification with him, document a description of the items in the patient's medical record.
9. Complete a personal property form identifying the items being stored as well as the items remaining with the patient. Ask the patient to review and sign the form.
10. Document the procedure.²

Patient Teaching

Teach the patient about the facility's policy on patient valuables. Inform the patient that because there are typically no locks on the doors to patients' rooms valuables can't be considered safe in his room. Even if the patient's room has a locker or lockable drawers, stress to the patient that these items aren't designed to secure or make valuable items safe.

Documentation

Document what the patient was told concerning valuables on the unit and his response. Note whether any of his valuables were given to family members or friends to take home. If any valuables are kept in the patient's possession against staff advice, provide a description of the item in the patient's record and have another staff member co-sign the note as a witness that the patient was advised against keeping the item. If any items are secured on the unit, include an itemized list in the patient's medical record. If any items are secured in the facility safe, usually the staff from the business office documents the items and their descriptions.

References

1. The Joint Commission. *Comprehensive Accreditation Manual for Hospitals: The Official Handbook*. Standard NPSG.01.01.01. Oakbrook Terrace, Ill.: The Joint Commission, 2010.
2. The Joint Commission. *Comprehensive Accreditation Manual for Hospitals: The Official Handbook*. Standard RC.01.03.01. Oakbrook Terrace, Ill.: The Joint Commission, 2010.
3. Nettina, S.M. *Lippincott Manual of Nursing Practice*, 9th ed. Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, 2010.
4. Taylor, C., et al. *Fundamentals of Nursing: The Art and Science of Nursing Care*, 6th ed. Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, 200

Handling patient valuables on a psychiatric unit

1. Confirm the patient's identity.
2. Review the patient's valuables section of the facility handbook with the patient, if one is available.
3. Ask the patient if he has any valuables with him.
4. Inspect the patient's belongings per facility policy.
5. Advise the patient to have a family member or friend take all valuables home.
6. If the patient wants to keep his valuables in the facility, place them in valuables envelopes or bags, label them, and place them in your facility's designated secure area or the facility safe.
7. Inform the patient that his valuables will be returned to him when he's discharged.
8. If the patient insists on keeping valuable items with him on the unit, document a description of the items in the patient's medical record.
9. Complete a personal property form and ask the patient to review and sign it.
10. Document the procedure.