

Photographing patients for identification

Introduction

On psychiatric units where patient photographs are used for identification, it's accepted practice for all patients to have their photographs taken when they're admitted. The photos may be taken in the admission office, but it's usually done in the unit. In some facilities, photographs may be used in place of hospital identification bracelets.

Patient photographs can be an asset to the nursing staff for these reasons:

- They're accurate in identifying patients.
- The patient can be positively identified before being given medication.
- Identification bracelets can sometimes be removed or lost or they can become difficult to read.
- Many psychiatric units have patients with personality disorders who may attempt to deceive nursing staff. Such deception can have serious consequences if a patient is given incorrect medications based on false identification.
- Some psychiatric patients may be too ill or confused to correctly identify themselves.

Patient photographs should reflect as accurately as possible how the patient looks on a daily basis. For example, if a patient wears glasses for most of the day, the patient should have his photo taken with his glasses on.

Equipment

- Felt-tipped black pen with permanent ink
- Two cameras
- Film as needed

Preparation of Equipment

Camera batteries must be charged and the cameras must be maintained in excellent working condition *to ensure that they're functional when needed.*

Implementation

1. Ensure that informed consent for treatment and photographs has been obtained and is included in the patient's medical record.³
2. Confirm the patient's identity using two patient identifiers according to your facility's policy.¹
3. Explain to the patient that photographs are used for accurate identification of the patient on the unit and that taking photographs is part of the facility's admission process.
4. Stress that the photograph will be used only while the patient is on the unit.

5. Inform the patient that his photograph will be given to him when he's discharged. No other copy will be kept by the unit or the facility.
6. Take the patient's photograph.
7. Label the photograph with the patient's name, patient identification number, date, time, and your signature.
8. Place the photograph in the patient's medication profile. In some facilities, the photograph will be placed in the patient's treatment team paperwork.
9. If the patient refuses to have his photograph taken, notify the unit's charge nurse and ask the patient about his objections to having his photograph taken.
10. Notify the patient's psychiatrist if he continues to refuse to have his photograph taken. *In some facilities, failure to comply with unit rules can result in discharge.*
11. Document the procedure.²

Special Considerations

If the patient doesn't want to accept his photograph when he's discharged, it's typically unit policy to shred the photo in the presence of the patient. If the patient refuses to watch his photograph being shredded, ask another staff member to witness the shredding.

Documentation

Document that the patient's photograph was taken and where it was placed. If the patient refuses to have his photograph taken, document the reason given by the patient for the refusal, if any, and the name and title of individuals notified of the patient's refusal. Document that the photograph was returned to the patient when he was discharged or that it was refused and subsequently shredded. Note whether the patient witnessed the shredding or the name of the person who did.

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. The Joint Commission. *Comprehensive Accreditation Manual for Hospitals: The Official Handbook*. Standard RI.01.03.01. Oakbrook Terrace, Ill.: The Joint Commission, 2010.
4. Nettina, S.M. *Lippincott Manual of Nursing Practice*, 9th ed. Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, 2010.
5. Taylor, C., et al. *Fundamentals of Nursing: The Art and Science of Nursing Care*, 6th ed. Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, 2008.
6. Varcarolis, E.M., et al. *Foundations of Psychiatric Mental Health Nursing: A Clinical Approach*, 5th ed. St. Louis: Saunders, 2006.

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1. Ensure that informed consent has been obtained and is included in the patient's medical record.
2. Confirm the patient's identity.
3. Explain to the patient that photographs are used for accurate identification of the patient on the unit.
4. Stress that the photograph will be used only while the patient is on the unit.
5. Inform the patient that his photograph will be given to him when he's discharged.
6. Take the patient's photograph.
7. Label the photograph with the patient's name, patient identification number, date, time, and your signature.
8. Place the photograph in the patient's medication profile or the patient's treatment team paperwork.
9. If the patient refuses to have his photograph taken, notify the unit's charge nurse and ask the patient about his objections to having his photograph taken.
10. Notify the patient's psychiatrist if he continues to refuse to have his photograph taken.
11. Document the procedure.