



Vice President and Chief Executive Officer of the Medical Center

MEDICAL CENTER POLICY NO. 0219

- A. SUBJECT: Searching a Patient and/or a Patient's Belongings
(Inpatient and Emergency Department)
- B. EFFECTIVE DATE: January 1, 2013 (R)
- C. POLICY:

In the course of providing care on inpatient units and in the Emergency Department, University of Virginia Medical Center personnel may have reason to believe that a patient possesses an item or substance that poses a potential hazard to the patient or others. In such circumstances, in order to protect the patient and/or others, it may become necessary to search the patient and/or his/her personal belongings to remove the potentially hazardous item or substance. This policy is intended to provide guidance for determining when a search may be necessary, how and by whom a search may be conducted, and when to seek the assistance of additional resources.

D. PROCEDURE:

1. IF A WEAPON IS SUSPECTED:

If it is suspected that a patient possesses a weapon such as a gun or a knife, Medical Center personnel shall immediately call 911. ([See also Medical Center Policy No. 0174 "Regulations of Weapons, Fireworks and Explosives on University Property"](#) and [Medical Center Policy No. 0220 "Interactions with Law Enforcement Authorities"](#).)

2. OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES WHERE A SEARCH MAY BE NECESSARY:

Indicators that a search is advisable as a safety or security precaution, and that Designated Medical Center Personnel¹ should be notified, include:

- a. The patient is observed ingesting or attempting to ingest unknown substances such as medications or drugs without any reasonable explanation;
- b. The patient is observed handling an item in a manner that could cause injury;
- c. The patient self-reports circumstances described in Sections D.2.a or b. above;
- d. Other patients or visitors report that they have observed, firsthand, the patient engaging in behaviors such as those described in Sections D.2. a. or b. above;

¹ For purposes of this policy "Designated Medical Center Personnel" means Nurse Managers, Shift Managers/Charge Nurses, or Licensed Independent Practitioners (LIPs). For purposes of this policy, LIPs means physicians, physician assistants, and nurse practitioners.

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- e. The patient has a change in behavior or physical condition, which staff reasonably suspects, based on patient's history or reports may be due to ingestion of unknown substances such as medication or drugs;
 - f. The patient is on Suicide Precautions as described in [Medical Center Policy No. 0197 "Suicide Risk Assessment and Prevention"](#).
3. If Designated Medical Center Personnel determine that a search of the patient and/or the patient's belongings is necessary (other than a weapon as described in Section D.1), the Nursing Supervisor or Nurse Manager/Shift Manager, in the presence of a nurse, shall ask the patient to consent to a search. If the patient consents, any items found that are deemed harmful to the patient shall be handled in the following manner:
 - a. Legal items (e.g., prescription medications, cigarettes/lighters) shall be labeled with the patient's name and placed in safekeeping.
 - b. Substances that appear illegal and associated paraphernalia shall be turned over to the Nursing Supervisor who shall notify University Police for disposal.
 4. If the patient refuses to be searched, the Nursing Supervisor or Nurse Manager/Shift Manager, plus one nurse and the patient's LIP, shall assess whether grounds exist to search the patient without the patient's consent (i.e., reason to believe that the patient is in possession or control of harmful substances/items, including medications and drugs, which might pose a threat of injury to the patient or others). The Nursing Supervisor/Nurse Manager/Shift Manager shall contact Medical Center Security as needed for assistance in assessment.
 5. Once the assessment described above has been conducted, the Nursing Supervisor/Nurse Manager/Shift Manager, Medical Center Security, one nurse, and the LIP shall be present to conduct the search. Restraints may only be imposed to ensure the immediate physical safety of the patient, a staff member or others, and must be discontinued at the earliest possible time. (See [Medical Center Policy No. 0159 "Restraint and Seclusion of Patients"](#).)
 6. Any substance or item found during the search that is deemed harmful to the patient or others shall be handled in the same manner as in Section D.3 above.
 7. The reason for and the outcome (findings) of any search conducted pursuant to this Policy shall be documented in the patient's medical record.

SIGNATURE:



R. Edward Howell, CEO, UVA Medical Center

DATE:

12/21/12

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Approved October 16, 2000

Revised August 2001, August 2003, December 2006, December 2009, December 2012

Approved by Chief Nursing Officer

Approved by Medical Center Administration