

*VALLEYCARE*  
**OLIVE VIEW-UCLA MEDICAL CENTER/HEALTH CENTERS  
POLICY & PROCEDURE**

**NUMBER: 207  
VERSION: 3**

**SUBJECT/TITLE: ELOPEMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH PATIENTS**

**POLICY:** To ensure staff is aware of their responsibilities in the event a mental health patient elopes. Patient rights will not be infringed upon during this process.

**PURPOSE:** To define the personnel responsibilities in the event a mental health patient elopes.

**DEPARTMENTS:** All

**DEFINITIONS:** **Elopement:** An act of escaping or running away.

**Mental health hold:** Involuntary detainment under the Lanterman-Petris-Short Act (LPS).

**Mental health patient:** Any person voluntarily admitted to the psychiatric unit or involuntarily detained (legal hold) under the Lanterman-Petris-Short Act (LPS) regardless of unit of admission.

**PROCEDURE: A. VOLUNTARY PATIENTS:**

1. Voluntary patients will be informed that they may leave the institution at any time by giving notice of his/her desire to leave to any member of the hospital staff and completing normal hospital departure procedures.
2. A physician will be notified of the patient's desire to leave and will complete an evaluation of the patient within 1 hour to determine if it is safe for the patient to leave or place the patient on a legal hold.
3. Elopement only applies to those patients who have been placed on a legal hold, not to those patients whose admission is voluntary.

**B. INVOLUTARY PATIENTS:**

1. For every elopement of a patient on a mental health hold:
  - a. Nursing staff will notify Sheriff Dispatch by telephone and provide the patient's name, home address and physical description. A reasonable search will be conducted by the County Sheriff which is limited to Hospital grounds or property.

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- b. RN will:
    - i. Notify the patient's primary physician (and psychiatrist, as appropriate) and Nurse Administrator.
    - ii. Complete form – Request for Apprehension of Involuntary Patient in triplicate. The physician must sign the form. The original and a copy of the form are submitted to Sheriff; the other copy is to be filled in the patient's chart.
  - c. Notification of elopement:
    - i. If on admission, the patient has provided a written consent to release information to an identified party, RN or MD will call the identified family member, significant other, or responsible person and advise them that the patient has eloped.
    - ii. If a patient has been determined by clinical staff to be a Tarasoff case, the identifiable potential victim(s) of threat must be immediately notified about the patient's elopement. A Tarasoff case overrides a patient's non-consent to release information to any party. (For details on the Tarasoff Decision, refer to Policy No. 448 in the Department of Psychiatry Policy & Procedure Manual).
  - d. Make a nursing entry in the patient's chart describing the circumstances of the elopement.
  - e. Event Notification will be submitted per policy in the Patient Safety Net.
2. If a patient on a mental health hold elopes and does not return within three (3) hours, the patient is to be removed from the unit census.

**C. ALL MENTAL HEALTH PATIENTS:**

All staff supervising patients on outside breaks will be aware of the legal status (voluntary vs. involuntary) of the patients.

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References:

Varcarolis, Elizabeth, et al. (2006). Foundations of Psychiatric Mental Health Nursing (5<sup>th</sup> ed.) St. Louis: Saunders.

Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (2007) Accreditation Manual for Hospitals. Oakbrook Terrace, IL: Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations.

Official California Code of Regulations (1996). Title 22, Social Security division 5. San Francisco, CA: Barclay Law Publishers.

State of California, Health and Welfare Agency, Welfare & Institutions Code, Section 5000 st seq.

State of California, Health and Safety Code, Division 4, Chapter 6, Sections 3350, 3351, 3353.

State of California, Penal Code, Section 19.

Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) New York: World Publishing.

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