

HARBOR-UCLA MEDICAL CENTER

SUBJECT: PATIENT ELOPEMENT (CODE GREEN)

POLICY NO. 346A

PURPOSE:

To provide an appropriate response in the event of a missing or eloping patient who is determined to be a danger to him/herself or others, or who is identified as a safety risk.

POLICY:

At Harbor-UCLA Medical Center, in the event of a missing or eloping patient on a psychiatric hold/ involuntary hold (e.g.5150, 5250) staff are to activate a Code Green, by contacting the Los Angeles County Sherriff’s Department (LASD) at x3311 or (310) 222-3311 and inform the Sheriff’s Dispatch that a “Code Green” has occurred, if the patient is on any involuntary hold, give description of patient and indicate the location. Patients on a psychiatric/involuntary hold are not legally free to leave the hospital. Because of this imposed involuntary hold status any attempt to elope is a legal issue and a law enforcement matter which necessitates police involvement. Nursing staff is not to follow patients who elope, except as noted below under “Minors”.

DEFINITIONS:

A patient who is identified as a safety risk fits the following criteria:

1. On a legal hold (danger to themselves or others).
2. Having active suicidal/homicidal ideation and may be on a voluntary status.
3. Gravely disabled-unable to provide food, shelter or clothing.
4. On a “patient watch” or has a safety attendant/sitter.
5. Confused, disoriented or otherwise appearing to lack mental capacity.

PROCEDURE:

- A. In the event that a patient on a psychiatric/involuntary hold who is missing or is suspected of elopement, the nursing staff will immediately:
  1. Notify the Los Angeles County Sherriff’s Department (LASD) at x 3311 to activate “Code Green” and provide the following information:
    - a. Patient care unit where the patient was assigned.
    - b. Description of the eloped patient.
    - c. Time and location the patient was last seen.

EFFECTIVE DATE: 01/17

SUPERSEDES:

REVISED:

REVIEWED: 01/17

REVIEWED COMMITTEE: Environment of Care Committee

APPROVED BY:

Kim McKenzie, RN, MSN, CPHQ  
Chief Executive Officer

Anish Mahajan, MD  
Chief Medical Officer

Patricia Soltero Sanchez, RN, BSN, MAOM  
Interim Chief Nursing Officer

Signature(s) on File.

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2. After notification of the patient's elopement, Sherriff's are responsible for conducting a reasonable search for the patient, and to return him/her, if found. If the patient cannot be found after a reasonable search is conducted, LASD, Harbor Station, files a missing person's report and notifies the law enforcement agency having jurisdiction where the patient lives. LASD notifies nursing of the status of the search.
  3. Notify the Nurse Manager or House Supervisor if the Nurse Manager is not on campus.
  4. Notify the Physician(s) in charge of the patient.
  5. Document the circumstances surrounding the elopement, including the date and time in the Nursing Notes.
  6. Enter an event report in the UHC Safety Intelligence (SI) System.
- B. Minors**
1. If a minor on a psychiatric hold attempts to elope, the patient may be detained. A Code Gold and the LASD may be called at the discretion of the staff caring for the patient.
  2. If a minor elopes, the LASD must be called immediately. Staff member may follow the eloping minor if safety allows. If possible, the pursuing staff will contact LASD with the eloping minor's location.
- C. In the event that a patient on a psychiatric hold elopes, the physician in charge will:**
1. Notify the patient's family or next of kin, if known;
  2. Notify the psychiatry consultation/liason service;
  3. Document the circumstances surrounding the elopement, including the date and time in the electronic medical record.
- D. In the event that the eloped patient is not on a psychiatric/involuntary hold but does present a safety risk the following must be completed:**
- 1. Physician and Nursing**
    - a. Upon learning that a patient has been absent four (4) or more hours, Nursing will notify the responsible Physician(s) in charge of the patient and Nurse Manager or House Supervisor if the Nurse Manager is not on campus. An attempt may be made to locate the patient at home or at the address of relatives, if known.
    - b. Any patient, whose whereabouts are unknown for four (4) or more hours, is to be discharged as Against Medical Advice (AMA), effective at the end of the fourth hour.
    - c. Patients who return after having been discharged should be directed to the Emergency Department to be evaluated.
  - 2. Physician**
    - a. Enter a Discharge Order indicating patient left Against Medical Advice (AMA) in the patient's electronic medical record.
  - 3. Nursing**
    - a. Document a nursing discharge note in the patient's electronic medical record.
    - b. Enter an event report in the UHC Safety Intelligence (SI) System.
- E. Training and Education**
1. Patient care staff receives appropriate orientation and training relative to working with high-risk elopement patients.
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**REFERENCES:**

- Hospital and Medical Administration Policy No. 301 “Discharge Policy, Procedures, and Guidelines, Including Elopement & AMA”
- Hospital and Medical Administration Policy No. 346 “Involuntary Holds on Non-Psychiatric Units and the Emergency Department”