



Interception Of Patients Mail Procedure

Procedure Number
WCDHB-MHS-0065

Version Nos:
3

1. Purpose

This Procedure outlines the processes for the interception of patients mail by the West Coast District Health Board (WCDHB) Mental Health Service (MHS).

2. Application

This Procedure is to be followed by all WCDHB MHS clinical staff.

3. Definitions

For the purposes of this Procedure.

Postal Item is taken to mean letter, post card, parcel or any other item generally considered to be mail.

4. Responsibilities

For the purposes of this Procedure:

Psychiatrists are required to:

- make a determination that the receipt or dispatch of the postal item could be detrimental to the patient's interests;
- gain the approval of the DAMHS;
- inform staff members and the patient concerned;
- ensure that mail withheld is either returned to the sender or handed over to the District Inspector or Official Visitor.

Staff Members are required to:

- abide by the instructions of the Psychiatrist with regard to the interception of patient's postal items;
- withhold any postal item addressed to an individual(s) where the individual(s) has requested not to receive mail from the patient.

5. Resources Required

This Procedure requires:

- i) Patient's Clinical Record

6. Process

- 1.01 In general, incoming and outgoing postal items (*except those outlined in Sections 1.08 and 1.09*) addressed to and from WCDHB MHS inpatients must remain unopened and not withheld, unless the patient's Psychiatrist has reasonable grounds for believing that the receipt or dispatch of the postal items could be detrimental to the interests of the patient and their treatment.
- 1.02 Before any postal item can be withheld and/or opened, the Psychiatrist must:
 - i) believe that the receipt or dispatch of the postal item could be detrimental to the patient's interests; and
 - ii) have obtained the approval of the Director of Area Mental Health Service (DAMHS); and



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- iii) document in the patient's clinical record the reasons in support of (i) and the approval gained in (ii).
- 1.03 The determination of the reasons why the receipt or dispatch of the postal item could be detrimental to the patient are to be based on clinical reasons only, and is not concerned with third party interests, except where a third party has informed the WCDHB MHS that they do not wish to receive mail from the patient (*See Section 1.10*) What is reasonable would depend on prevailing professional standards and practices.
- 1.04 The Psychiatrist is to instruct all relevant staff members (by written entry into the patient's clinical record) of their decision as to the withholding and/or open the patient's item, and for the period that this is to occur.
- 1.05 Where a decision is taken to withhold or open a patient's postal item, the relevant patient is to be informed of this, unless the Psychiatrist believes that this would be detrimental to the patient's interests.
- 1.06 Incoming postal items that have been withheld are to be returned to the sender if their address is known.
- 1.07 If the sender's address is unknown; or it an outgoing postal item, staff members are to either give the postal item(s) to the District Inspector or Official Visitor at the next reasonable opportunity.
- 1.08 An incoming or outgoing postal item may not be withheld but may be opened if it is addressed to or from:
- i) a Member of Parliament; or
 - ii) a Judge, Officer of the Court, or member or officer of any judicial body; or
 - iii) an Ombudsman; or
 - iv) the Director-General of Health ; or
 - v) the District Inspector or an Official Visitor; or
 - vi) the Chief Executive Officer (or designate); or
 - vii) any Psychiatrist from whom a second opinion has been requested by the patient.
- 1.09 Under no circumstances is mail addressed to or from a Barrister or Solicitor to be withheld or opened.
- 1.10 If an individual(s) notified the WCDHB MHS that they do not wish to receive mail from the patient, then this is to be recorded in the patient's clinical record by the staff member receiving the instruction. All staff members must withhold any postal item addressed to the individual(s) concerned. This does not require the prior approval or instruction of a Psychiatrist or DAMHS.
- 1.11 Where a decision is taken to withhold a patient's postal item due to the request of any individual(s), the relevant patient is to be informed of this, unless the Psychiatrist believes that this would be detrimental to the patient's interests.



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7. Precautions And Considerations

- ➔ Incoming and outgoing postal items addressed to and from WCDHB MHS inpatients must remain unopened and not withheld, unless the patient's Psychiatrist has reasonable grounds for believing that the receipt or dispatch of the postal items could be detrimental to the interests of the patient and their treatment.
- ➔ The Psychiatrist is to instruct all relevant staff members (by written entry into the patient's clinical record) of their decision as to the withholding and/or open the patient's item, and for the period that this is to occur.
- ➔ Where a decision is taken to withhold or open a patient's postal item, the relevant patient is to be informed of this, unless the Psychiatrist believes that this would be detrimental to the patient's interests.
- ➔ If an individual(s) notified the WCDHB MHS that they do not wish to receive mail from the patient, then postal items addressed to them are to be withheld

8. References

Mental Health (Compulsory Assessment and Treatment) Act and Amendments (1992)

9. Related Documents

WCDHB Clinical Documentation Procedure

Revision History	Version:	3
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