



# Searching IPU Patients And Their Property Procedure

Procedure Number  
WCDHB-MHS-0073

Version Nos:  
**3**

## 1. Purpose

The purpose of this Procedure is to set the parameters under which staff may undertake a search of a client of Manaakitanga in-patient unit or of their personal property, in order to maintain the safety of the acute inpatient environment, the clients and staff in the West Coast District Health Board (WCDHB) Mental Health Service (MHS) Inpatient Unit (IPU).

## 2. Application

This Procedure is to be followed by all WCDHB MHS staff members working in the IPU

## 3. Definitions

For the purposes of this Procedure:

**Client** any person admitted to Manaakitanga for the purpose of receiving MH assessment and/or treatment.

**Personal search** is where the client is required, for reasons of safety, to empty their pockets, or if necessary, change into their clothes that have been previously searched. A metal detector may also be used if indicated and available. Personal search does **not include search of body cavities**. This will not occur under any circumstances.

**Personal property** includes any item or article owned by or in the possession of the client

**Personal property search** is where the client's room and possessions will be searched for secreted illegal items and/or items that increase risk to the safety of the individual, others or the environment.

**Admission property search** assists staff to provide a safe environment as personal property checked to remove – any personal medication, any weapons, any drugs (includes alcohol)

## 4. Responsibilities

For the purposes of this Procedure:

WCDHB MHS recognises its responsibilities to provide a culturally and clinically safe environment for clients and staff of Manaakitanga inpatient unit. To maintain this safety may require regular and occasional search of clients and their property. Physical searches and seizure of personal property are lawful where it is deemed, by the Team Leader or Shift Coordinator, as being reasonable and necessary Searches may only be conducted where there is **reasonable concern** that the client may be in possession of items considered dangerous to themselves or others. Every client has a right to be free from unreasonable search and seizure of their person, property and correspondence.

## 5. Resources Required

This Procedure requires no specific resources

## 6. Process

- 1.00 A personal and property search is to be undertaken prior to a client being placed in seclusion. This is the only time that a personal and property search is conducted as part of routine care.
- 1.01 It is important (prior to the search) to establish that there are reasonable grounds to believe the client may be in possession of illicit substances and/or harmful objects.



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- 1.01 The search is only to consist of such steps, which are reasonable in the circumstances and the minimum necessary to establish whether or not the patient does have the dangerous item(s) in their possession.
- 1.02 Indication for search can include:
  - Routine as part of the admission process; and/or
  - There is reason for believing that the client may be carrying illicit substances of abuse, or a dangerous object; and/or
  - There is potential for harm to self or others; and/or
  - Client is under the Mental Health Act and is being placed into seclusion.
- 1.03 Discuss the need to conduct a search with a senior member of staff.
- 1.04 Inform the client that you suspect that they may be in possession of illicit substances or potentially dangerous objects and ask that they hand these over for safe keeping or disposal
- 1.05 A search must be carried out in the least intrusive manner, giving every consideration to the dignity of the client.
- 1.06 Two staff members must be present throughout the procedure, and of the same gender as the client, where possible.
- 1.07 Where possible provide privacy with awareness of issues of gender, sexuality, religion and culture, and avoid unnecessary touching.
- 1.08 Ask client to accompany staff to witness search of personal property – clothing and other possessions
- 1.09 Ask the client to ‘self search’ by demonstrating they do not have any dangerous objects on their person by:
  - 1) Emptying pockets
  - 2) Fingers through their own hair
  - 3) Showing contents of their mouth
- 1.10 If still concerned provide client with clothing that has been previously searched and ask that they change clothes.
- 1.11 Search through clothing that has been removed.
- 1.12 If the client’s cooperation is not forthcoming, and staff feel there is an imminent risk of harm to the patient or others, the client should be advised that the Police may be called to assist with the search.
- 1.13 It is reasonable that the following will be removed from a client’s possession while they are an Inpatient.
  - Prescription medicines – placed in safe-keeping and returned on discharge from the unit or given to family/whanau for safe keeping
  - Noxious substances including flammable liquids, glue etc - placed in safe keeping and returned on discharge/or given to family members for safe keeping
  - Alcohol – returned to family members for return home/disposal



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- Illicit drugs – removed from client and placed in Police custody. The
- Police have the discretion whether to lay charges or not.
- Offensive weapons – removed from client and placed in Police custody.

1.14 Whenever a search has been undertaken details and outcome of the search will be documented in the client clinical record – including details of items seized/removed from the client's possession. Additionally, complete a WCDHB MHS Incident Report and inform Psychiatrist and Operations Manager.

## 7. Precautions And Considerations

- ➔ Internal (cavity) searches are never undertaken by MHS staff. If such a search is considered necessary, the Consultant Psychiatrist will liaise with the Police and with the Accident and Emergency Department.
- ➔ Powers to detain and restrain a person are contained within Part One of the MH Act . However, these do not exist with the specific intention to enable staff to search a client.

## 8. References

Health & Disability Sector Standards NZS 8134:2008

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

New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990

Code of Health and Disability Services Consumers' Rights

## 9. Related Documents

WCDHB MHS Service Provision Framework

<b>Revision History</b>	<b>Version:</b>	3
	<b>Developed By:</b>	CBT Working Party
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