



# Search Of Patients Procedure

Procedure Number

WCDHB-PG-0021

Version Nos:

4

## 1. Purpose

This Procedure outlines the process for the searching of patients and their property while they are inpatients within a West Coast District Health Board (WCDHB) Hospital.

## 2. Application

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

## 3. Definitions

For the purposes of this Procedure:

***Dangerous Items*** are taken to mean:

- Prohibited medications or illegal substances;
- Medications other than those prescribed by a Doctor;
- Knives, firearms, ammunition, or other dangerous items;
- Intoxicating beverages or substances;
- Other items which present a danger to the life, health, and/or safety of the patient and others.

## 4. Responsibilities

For the purposes of this Procedure:

***All Staff Members*** are required to abide by the requirements of this Procedure.

## 5. Resources Required

This Procedure requires:

- i) WCDHB Patient Search Consent Form

## 6. Process

- 1.00 WCDHB and its staff members have no express legal powers to search patients or their property. However, there is an implied power of search where it is believed that a search is necessary to safeguard the safety and health of patients and/or staff members.
- 1.01 Wherever staff members believe that any patient has in their possession dangerous items, consideration needs to be given to contacting the Police and requesting that they undertake the search.
- 1.02 Where it is believed that a search of a patient and/or their possessions is necessary to safeguard the safety and health of patients and/or staff members, staff members should first consider if there is any means of checking for dangerous items without affecting a formal search. It is important that all alternatives are considered and where practicable attempted before a search is undertaken.
- 1.03 Only if 1.02 is unsuccessful or impracticable should staff members contemplate undertaking a search.
- 1.04 At all stages of the search process there are to be two or more staff members present.



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- 1.05 The first step in conducting a search is to obtain the consent (in writing) of the patient. When obtaining consent, staff members need to explain to the patient:
- i) the nature or identity of the items being searched for; and
  - ii) the reasons for believing that the patient may have these items in their possession; and
  - iii) the reasons why it is necessary for these suspected dangerous items to be removed from the patient.
- 1.06 Patients are not to be told that consenting to a search is a condition of admission or treatment.
- 1.07 If a patient does not consent to the search, and it is impracticable to take any other step which may lead to the discovery of the suspected dangerous item, staff should proceed with the search.
- 1.08 Staff members are to limit the search to any item, which they reasonably consider to be dangerous to the health and safety of patients and/or staff members.
- 1.09 It is important that staff members document their reasons for conducting the search including the nature of the property being searched for and the reasons for believing that the patient does in fact have dangerous items in their possession.
- 1.10 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.
- 1.11 The search is to be undertaken in such a way as to cause minimum distress or embarrassment to the patient. Considerations include:
- i) gender of staff member(s) undertaking the search;
  - ii) location of the search;
  - iii) timing of the search.
- 1.12 Staff are to advise the patient that they are allowed to contact a lawyer or other support person before the search is conducted, or to have the lawyer or support person present during the search, then this request is to be granted if possible.
- 1.13 If a patient has a dangerous item, they should be advised that it must be given to staff members for custody, or sent home with family/whanau/caregiver. Consideration is also to be given to the reporting of the dangerous items to the Police.
- 1.14 The outcome of the search is to be fully documented, including persons present during the search, the results of search and final disposition of the dangerous item(s).



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### 7. Precautions And Considerations

- ➔ A search is only to be undertaken where it is believed that a search is necessary to safeguard the safety and health of patients and/or staff members.
- ➔ It is important that all alternatives are considered and where practicable attempted before a search is undertaken.
- ➔ The search is to be undertaken in such a way as to cause minimum distress or embarrassment to the patient

### 8. References

NZ Bill Of Rights (1990)

Health and Safety in Employment Act (1992) and Amendments

### 9. Related Documents

WCDHB Clinical Documentation Procedure

WCDHB Informed Consent Procedure

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|                         | <b>Developed By:</b>        | Risk Manager            |
|                         | <b>Authorised By:</b>       | Chief Executive Officer |
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