

CONNECTICUT VALLEY HOSPITAL OPERATIONAL PROCEDURE MANUAL

SECTION I:	PATIENT FOCUSED FUNCTIONS
CHAPTER 1:	Ethics, Rights and Responsibilities
PROCEDURE 1.11:	Patient Searches
REVISED:	11/97; 06/11/07; 04/26/10; 08/08/16; 12/19/16; 4/24/17; 05/8/17; 02/18
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PURPOSE: To maintain a safe environment for all individuals served by Connecticut Valley Hospital without unduly interfering with treatment, creating security risks, infringing on individual rights or causing harm to the patient or others. These rights as provided for in Connecticut General Statutes, Section 17a-548.

SCOPE: All Clinical Staff in CVH

POLICY:

It is the policy of CVH that the hospital maintains a safe, therapeutic environment for its patients and families. Having a safe environment for all is accomplished through periodic searches of the patient, his/her belongings, and/or the hospital environment. Searches are conducted to minimize or eliminate the presence of dangerous objects in the environment.

Definitions:

Emergency – A search may be conducted immediately only when there is a serious concern for patient welfare and safety or facility security. The object or item being sought has life-threatening potential if it is not found by the staff, or if it were to be found by non-staff.

Non-Emergency – A search that is conducted when there is no immediate threat to life or safety by the object or item being sought. *Examples:* money or personal property of another patient or staff member. The patient shall be permitted to be present during any search of his/her personal possessions.

Individual Property Search – A search of personal items belonging to the patient.

Non-Emergency Search of Common Living Areas and Furniture – Applies to situations where there is no immediate threat to life and safety by the object or item being sought. The hospital's property is generally defined as those items integral to structure and décor, and/or intended for common use. Examples include, but are not limited to: lockers, wardrobes, bedside stands, furniture, and trash cans. A patient's personal property may be stored in and on some items of hospital property; such searches may be conducted on a routine or random basis depending on location and/or level of urgency.

Individual Body Searches – A physical examination of a individual body, from a simple "pat down" to a strip search (a removal of clothing and reviewing the clothing contents and the exterior body) to a "body cavity search". Each of these increasing levels of inspection is

rigorously reviewed and authorized and is to be conducted with full respect for personal dignity and the right to privacy of the patient involved.

Medically Harmful - Items which are capable of inflicting serious mental or physical injury on the patient, or producing in the patient a disturbed mental state or impaired judgment which may be grossly detrimental to his physical or mental well being.

Non-Permissible/Prohibited Items - Items not permitted on in-patient units which pose significant risk or are prohibited by hospital and Commissioner Policy. Such items may be returned to the sender, visitor or, where not otherwise disposed of, placed in the patients' storage area. Also included are items which may be illegal, including drugs, medications (prescribed or not prescribed), alcohol, weapons and sharps found on a patient, in a patient area or other unsecured location.

PROCEDURE:

- I. CVH nursing staff conduct individual searches of patient property as a part of the admission/transfer/readmission process. In ASD, 2 staff are required to do the initial search of belongings and write their initials on the property sheet.
- II. Patients are permitted to be present during such searches. These rights to be present during a search shall be denied only if the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Medical Director, or his/her authorized representative determines that it is medically harmful to the patient to exercise such rights. An explanation of such denial shall be placed in the patients' permanent clinical record.
- III. Typically CVH nursing staff (although others may be asked to assist) conducts searches to preserve the security and safety. Individual division procedures specify frequency of such searches. Some searches are announced, some are unannounced because there is reason to believe that there are prohibited items in the area, based on behavior or talk on the unit. These searches are conducted in common areas or patient occupied areas. Examples of such hazards include perishable food items that could cause illness if ingested after improper storage; food items or debris that would attract vermin; trash that may create a fire threat or contraband items like aerosol cans, matches or lighters.
- IV. Whenever any search results in discovery of significant prohibited items or a situation that would be deemed a critical incident, The CEO, Medical Director or their designee will be notified of this search as soon as is reasonable.
- V. Mail and package searches are conducted by CVH Nursing staff to check for prohibited or restricted items following specific procedures outlined in [Operational Procedure 1.18 Patient Communication and Restriction of Communication](#).
- VI. CVH staff may request, that mail or packages be screened either through x-ray machinery and/or are opened in the staff member presence however, staff is not permitted to read patient correspondence without the patient's permission. All permissible items will be given to the patient.
 - A. Non-permissible mail or packages will be returned to sender. Should the patient refuse to open the package, it will be returned to sender in its entirety. When a package is

returned to the sender, a letter explaining the reason for the return along with the hospital's procedure on permitted and non-permissible items will be provided.

- B. In the event that there is suspicion that an item of mail or package may contain illegal substances or dangerous weapons, the package will be held and the patient notified that this package is subject to consideration of a search warrant. Division and hospital leadership will be notified. Should a search warrant be obtained, the Agency Police will search the package and all non-permissible items will be confiscated and legal action taken in cases where federal or state law has been violated. Division and hospital leadership will be immediately notified.

VII. CVH Staff will inform all visitors of hospital's procedure regarding bringing packages into the hospital as well as specific guidelines hospital staff must follow in allowing certain items into the hospital including permissible items and the need to screen or x-ray all packages before they are allowed onto the patient units. Visitors are also advised that all permitted items will be inventoried and listed in the patient's medical record.

- A. When non-permissible/prohibited items have been found, the visitor will be asked to remove such items from the hospital building or, if not possible, have them stored in the reception area until the visit has ended. A copy of the hospital's or Division's list of permissible and non-permissible items will be provided to the visitor. If visitors decline to show the contents of the packages, they will be advised to remove such items from the hospital building or have them stored in the reception area for them until they leave.
- B. Agency Police will assist the staff member assigned to this duty with any problems regarding packages from visitors.
 - 1. Individual body searches are conducted when there is grave concern for the health and welfare of the patient, other patients, staff or facility security. Such body searches *require a physician order prior to any examination*.
 - 2. When such conditions exist, unit nursing staff will alert the attending physician, Supervising Nurse or Agency Police Officer that an object or item being sought has life-threatening potential if it is not found by the clinical staff, or if it were to be found by non-staff. Where possible, authorization and approval in advance by the CEO, Medical Director or their designee is required unless an extreme, immediate or emergency situation exists. Where such exists, these searches must be authorized by the Attending Psychiatrist or On-Call Physician or senior nursing staff only, with immediate notification to both division and hospital leadership as soon as the emergency has been reasonably resolved.
 - 3. Individual body searches are permitted and are conducted for only the most serious of circumstances, and with careful and thoughtful consideration for full personal dignity and rights to privacy. Therefore, gender considerations regarding who will be present during searches are decided upon before the search is conducted, unless extreme emergency precludes such consideration. Only in an extreme emergency, and with prior authorization by the CEO or their designee, will a patient be strip/body searched without a person of the same gender being present. Such searches are conducted by the RN, in the case of body searches, or by the RN and physician, in the case of body cavity searches.

4. Individual body searches are conducted *only under emergency circumstances*.
There will be no circumstances *where individual body searches are conducted for any other reasons*.
5. Patient individual searches are only conducted under emergency situations and at the time of transfer, or re-admission.