



# Safety Notice SN004/16

## ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT OF RISK OF ABSCONDING FROM DECLARED MENTAL HEALTH INPATIENT UNITS

**22 June 2016**

**Distributed to:**

- Chief Executives
- Directors of Clinical Governance
- Directors of Mental Health
- Associate Director, Private Health Care Unit, MOH

**Action required by:**

- Chief Executives
- Directors of Clinical Governance
- Directors of Mental Health

**We recommend you also inform:**

- Directors of Nursing in Mental Health Units
- All acute inpatient Mental Health Services
- Directors of Emergency Departments

**Content reviewed by:**

- Chief Psychiatrist

**Clinical Excellence Commission**

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As a result of a number of incidents of patients absconding from mental health inpatient units, a safety notice is being issued to Local Health Districts and Specialty Health Networks (LHDs and SHNs). Chief Executives are to ensure that a rigorous process is in place to support the safe and appropriate assessment of involuntary patients prior to the approval of leave being granted from a mental health inpatient unit.

The Transfer of Care from Mental Health Inpatient Services PD2012\_060 [http://www0.health.nsw.gov.au/policies/pd/2012/PD2012\\_060.html](http://www0.health.nsw.gov.au/policies/pd/2012/PD2012_060.html) outlines the procedures to be undertaken before leave can be granted to involuntary patients:

- A leave plan be developed that includes guidance for the consumer and family/carer concerning measures to manage risks during leave for example self/harm/suicide, harm to others, and domestic violence;
- The provision of a crisis plan if difficulties arise during the leave period; and
- Written advice and information is provided to the family/carer prior to the leave.

As a result of a recent review of incidents of absconding patients, the NSW Ministry of Health now requires an addition to the above procedures. Leave decisions are required to be considered by a multidisciplinary team with regard to improved assessment and management of the risk of harm to self or others from patients prior to approval by the treating psychiatrist.

**Local Health Districts/Networks should**

1. Distribute this notice to all stakeholders and all mental health inpatient units.
2. Undertake a safety audit of the physical environment of all mental health inpatient units in the LHD/SHN to identify any requirements to reduce the risk of patients absconding and report to the Ministry by 1 August 2016.
3. Review any absconding incidents to identify areas for improvement of risk management and report to the Ministry by 1 August 2016.
4. Audit and revise the current procedures for leave from mental health inpatient units with a view to reducing absconding incidents and to better assess and manage the risk of harm to self or others. This is to include a review of risk assessment protocols, including the patient's past history of absconding and current absconding risk. This is to be reported to the Ministry by 1 August 2016.
5. Ensure that any leave decisions be considered by a multidisciplinary team, and the outcomes documented, with regard to improved management of the risk of harm to self or others from patients prior to approval by the treating psychiatrist. The patient's leave plan must include written advice to the family/carer concerning measures to manage risks during leave, including risk of harm to self or others, and the provision of a crisis plan if difficulties arise during leave. This, and written advice and information, must be provided to the family/carer prior to the leave.

**Further information**

Further information can be obtained from the CEC [quality@cec.health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:quality@cec.health.nsw.gov.au) or Dr Karin Lines, A/Executive Director, Mental Health and Drug and Alcohol Office on [kline@doh.health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:kline@doh.health.nsw.gov.au) or (02) 9391 9262.

**Actions required by Local Health Districts/Networks**

1. Forward this safety notice to the appropriate area for action.
2. Ensure a system is in place to document actions taken.
3. Ensure LHDs/SHN respond to MOH by 1 August 2016 via email [kline@doh.health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:kline@doh.health.nsw.gov.au)