

OFFICE OF PATIENTS' RIGHTS

Protection & Advocacy, Inc.

100 Howe Avenue, Suite 210N

Sacramento, CA 95825-8202

Telephone (916) 575-1610

Toll Free (800) 254-5166

FAX (916) 575-1613

MEMORANDUM

TO: Interested Persons

FROM: Darla Rucker, Patients' Rights Specialist

RE: Good Cause for Denial of Rights

DATE: June 22, 2001

One of the primary responsibilities of advocates is to protect and advocate for the rights of individuals with mental illness. Protecting these rights most often arises when a hospital or other facility staff seeks to deny a patient their rights. This Information Letter discusses what constitutes good cause, the steps facilities must take when a right is denied, how rights are restored and what advocates can do to insure that rights are not improperly denied.

Rights of Persons With Psychiatric Disabilities

Persons with mental disabilities retain all the rights, privileges, opportunities and responsibilities as other citizens unless specifically limited by federal or state law or regulation. California Welfare & Institutions Code Section 5600.2(a). In addition, individuals diagnosed with mental illness who are hospitalized or receiving mental health services are afforded the specific rights set forth in Welfare and Institutions Code Sections 5325 and 5325.1. The rights set forth in section 5325.1 may not be denied for any reason. California Code of Regulations, Title 9 Section 865.2. These "non deniable" rights are:

The right to treatment services which promote the potential of the person to function independently. Treatment should be provided in ways that are least restrictive of the personal liberty of the individual.

The right to dignity, privacy, and human care.

Good Cause for Denial of Rights

The right to be free from harm, including unnecessary or excessive physical restraint, isolation, medication, abuse, or neglect. Medication may not be used as punishment, for the convenience of staff, as a substitute for, or in quantities that interfere with the treatment program.

The right to prompt medical care and treatment.

The right to religious freedom and practice.

The right to participate in appropriate programs of publicly supported education.

The right to social interaction and to participate in community activities.

The right to physical exercise and recreational opportunities.

The right to be free from hazardous procedures.

The rights set forth in Welfare and Institutions Code Section 5325 may be denied for good cause if the facility meets the criteria discussed below. These “deniable” rights are:

The right to wear one’s own clothing.

The right to keep and use one’s own personal possessions, including toilet articles, in a place accessible to the patient.

The right to keep and spend a reasonable sum of one’s money for small purchases.

The right to have access to individual storage space for his or her private use.

The right to see visitors each day.

The right to have reasonable access to telephones, both to make and receive confidential calls or to have such calls made for them.

The right to have ready access to letter-writing materials, including stamps and to mail and receive unopened correspondence.

In addition, these rights may also not be denied.

The right to see and receive the services of a patient advocate who has no direct or indirect clinical or administrative responsibility for the person.

The right to refuse convulsive treatment.

The right to refuse psychosurgery.

The rights listed in Welfare Institutions Code § 5325.1 may never be denied for any reason. California Code of Regulations, Title 9, § 865.2. In order for a facility to deny or restrict a patient any of the rights guaranteed in Welfare and Institutions Code § 5325,1, they must meet the following criteria:

Good Cause For Denial of Rights

State regulations provides the only mechanism by which the rights guaranteed in California Welfare and Institutions Code § 5325 may be denied. In order for a facility to deny or restrict any of these rights a facility must show good cause. Good cause for the denial of a right exists when the professional person in charge of the facility or his designee has good reason to believe one or all of the following:

- a) That the exercise of the specific right would be injurious to the patient; **or**
- b) That there is evidence that the specific right, if exercised, would seriously infringe on the rights of others; **or**
- c) That the institution or facility would suffer serious damage if the specific right is not denied; **and**
- d) That there is no less restrictive way of protecting the interest specified in a, b, or c above. California Code of Regulations, tit.9, § 865.2

Thus, a facility has to show two things: 1) exercising the right would injure the patient, infringe on other's rights or cause damage to the facility; **and** 2) there is no less restrictive way of addressing the situation. Advocates often indicate that facilities are remiss in demonstrating that less restrictive measures have been considered. For example, facilities will deny a patient the right to use the telephone for repeatedly calling 9-1-1 without first using the less restrictive

measure of observing the patient dial the telephone and then allowing them to complete the call in a confidential manner.

It is also clear that when a right is denied, the reason given for denying the right must have some clear relationship to the right denied. California Code of Regulation, tit 9 Section 5865.2 (b). If for example, a patient is denied the right to keep his cigarettes because he continues to set fires when smoking and the less restrictive measures have been unsuccessful (direct supervision when smoking.)

RIGHTS MAY NOT BE DENIED IN ADVANCE OR AS PART OF TREATMENT

Facility staff sometimes mistakenly believes that they can deny a right as a condition of admission, as part of a treatment plan, or because the patient or another person speaking on the patient's behalf has agreed to the denial. None of these reasons meet the good cause criteria. State laws and regulations specify the following:

- Rights may not be denied as a condition of admission, as part of a treatment plan, or for the convenience of staff, for punishment nor may they be treated as a privilege to be earned. California Code of Regulations, tit 9 Section 865.2(b)(c).
- Treatment modalities may not include any denial of rights. California Code of Regulations, tit 9 Section 865.2(c).
- Waivers signed by the patient, responsible relative, guardian, conservator cannot be used to deny a right. California Code of Regulations, tit 9 Section 865.2 (c); California Welfare & Institutions Code Section 5325.

Notification and Documentation of Denial of Rights

Title 9 also require that facilities follow certain notification and documentation procedures before they denial a patient's rights.

- Patients are entitled to an explanation for each denial of rights. This means that a patient must be told each time a right is denied and the reason why the right was denied. The patient must also be told of the content of the notation in his/her treatment record. California Code of Regulations, tit 9, Section 865.3 (a) (b).

- Each denial of a patient's right must be noted in the patient's treatment record. Documentation must take place immediately, whenever a right has been denied. Pursuant to California Code of Regulations, tit 9 Section 865.3 the documentation must include the following:
 - The date and time the right was denied.
 - The specific right denied.
 - Good cause for the denial of the right including less restrictive ways considered or tried.
 - Date of review if the denial was extended beyond 30 days.
 - The signature of the professional person in charge of the facility or his/her designee authorizing the denial of rights.

- Each denial of a right must be documented regardless of the gravity of the reason for the denial or the frequency with which a specific right is denied in a particular facility or to a particular individual. California Code of Regulations, tit 9 Section 865.2 (c).

- All denial of rights must be reported each quarter to the California Office of Patients' Rights. The Office of Patients' Rights prepares a report for the State Department of Mental Health regarding statewide denial of patient's rights.

Restoration of the Right

Once a right is denied it must be restored as soon as good cause for the denial is no longer present and the date of the restoration must be documented in the patient's chart. California Code of Regulations, tit.9, §§ 865.5, 866.

This means that a facility is obligated to continually assess whether or not good cause exists for the denial of a right. If for example, The patient who had his right to carry his own cigarettes denied, must be given frequent opportunities to show that he can keep possession of his cigarettes without harming himself or the facility.

What Advocates Can Do To Insure Rights Are Only Denied For Good Cause

Monitoring is one of the most effective ways advocates can insure that facilities are following the appropriate procedures for denying rights. Advocates have the authority to access patient treatment records. California Welfare & Inst. Code §§ 5520(b), 5545. A good practice is to randomly review charts at each facility on a periodic basis. When reviewing charts for “good cause denial, the advocate should request the facilities procedures for denials, then look for the following:

- ✓ Are denials of rights noted in the patient treatment records? If an advocate randomly selects a number of patient charts, it would be unusual not to see some denial of rights.
- ✓ The time when the denial of rights occurred. Does the notation appear to be made at the time the right was denied? For example, one might expect to see denial of rights notations made throughout the day rather than at the end of a shift.
- ✓ Does the denial of rights include the required documentation including: date and time, specific right denied, good cause, signature of person in charge of the facility or designee.
- ✓ Is there adequate documentation of good cause? For example does the treatment record note both the reason for the denial (injury to the patient, infringement on other’s rights, serious damage to the facility) **and** consideration of other less restrictive alternatives.
- ✓ Do the treatment records reflect that the patient was notified of the denial of rights?
- ✓ Do the treatment records indicate that the right was denied for an impermissible reason such as a condition of admission, part of a treatment plan or waivers signed by the patient or others?
- ✓ Do the treatment records reflect when the right was restored (if applicable)? If the right was denied longer than 30 days and the record does not indicate regular review dates or documentation for the continued denial, there is a procedural problem.

Good Cause for Denial of Rights

If the advocate notices serious problems with the denial of rights process and/or documents, the advocate should consider preparing a written report for the facility and/or mental health director and discuss the report with pertinent staff.

Training is another good strategy to use to protect patients' rights. Training can be particularly effective when following the monitoring of treatment records. When the training follows monitoring, the advocate can point to specific concerns he/she may have regarding the way in which the facility denies rights and/or documents denial of rights. Effective training would cover the following points:

- ✓ What rights can be denied? What rights can not be denied?
- ✓ What constitutes "good cause" and what a facility must do to document good cause.
- ✓ How to properly document denial of rights including notification to the patient.
- ✓ What does not constitute "good cause"? For example, waivers of rights, including denial of rights as part of a treatment plan.
- ✓ The county procedures a facility must follow complete the quarterly denial of rights reports.

Additional information regarding other types of facility or chart monitoring may be obtained from the Office of Patients' Rights. OPR staff is also available to assist County Advocates in preparing training materials.