

Effective: **December 1, 1996**

SUBJECT: **Elopement** Prepared By: **(Staff)**

**Director of Security**

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

(Staff), M.D.

President, Chief Executive Officer, and Medical Director

**PURPOSE:**

To describe the procedures to be followed when an inpatient leaves the Hospital grounds or a supervised area without permission.

**POLICY:**

When any patient elopes or is believed to be missing, it is the policy of the Hospital to act in accordance with the welfare of the patient and the public while respecting the patient's rights.

**GUIDELINES/PROCEDURE:**

A. When it becomes reasonably certain that a patient is missing, either through observation of elopement or recognition of absence from a supervised activity or area of the Hospital without authorization, the person making the observation (in most cases this will be nursing staff) or having knowledge of the situation must initiate action to locate the patient.

In the event that an employee unfamiliar with the patient observes the elopement, the employee should contact the Security Department and give them all the information that they have on the elopement. The Security Office will in turn notify the Associate Director of Nursing (Monday through Friday) daytime and at all other times Nursing Shift Coordinator, to inform them of the situation.

B. The Security Office should be notified immediately of the patient's elopement, and they will assist in a search for the patient. Unit staff familiar with the patient will be required to accompany Security on any search. The scope of the search will be determined by the Security Officer(s) conducting the search.

C. When the Police are notified, a (Your Health System) Missing Persons Report must be completed by a member of the clinical staff familiar with the patient. This report is given to a Security Officer for action.

The Security Department is responsible for contacting the (Local) Police, who will dispatch a car to (Your Health System). The Police will take missing patient calls from members of the (Your Health System) Security Department only.

I. Adult

A. Involuntary Patient

1. Definition: A patient who has been ordered by the court to undergo psychiatric treatment; any patient on observation status (scheduled for a certification hearing); or any patient who has been certified, either prior to admission or while at the Hospital.

2. Security will provide the Police with a copy of the (Your Health System) Missing Persons Report to be attached to the file copy of the police report. A copy of a photograph of the patient will be provided by unit staff. Security will also notify the Office of Planning and Public Information ("OPPI") or call the ("OPPI") designee after hours.

3. The signed (Your Health System) report indicating involuntary status provides the Police Department's legal authority to take the patient into custody against his/her will.

4. If the patient is located by Police within close proximity of the Hospital then the Police will provide transportation back to (Your Health System). However, in many instances Hospital personnel (Security) will be notified that the patient is in police custody, and the Hospital must make arrangements for transportation back to (Your Health System).

5. If the patient returns without police involvement, or is discharged prior to return, Security must be notified immediately so that they can inform the Police Department.

B. Voluntary Patient

1. Definition: Any patient who has signed himself/herself into the Hospital and when, upon elopement, there are not certification papers or other documentation on file which would change their status to involuntary.

2. Security will provide the police with a copy of the (Your Health System) Missing Persons Report to be attached to the file copy of the police report. Security will

also notify the Office of Planning and Public Information ("OPPI") or leave a message on the Office of Planning and Public Information's voice mail.

3. A signed (Your Health System) Missing Persons Report indicating voluntary status will indicate to the Police that they are being asked to assist in locating the patient. The following are the conditions under which they may legally apprehend a voluntary patient:

a. The Police are given a Petition for Emergency Evaluation completed by someone who has had significant contact with the patient within a reasonable period of time and who has determined that the patient is dangerous to himself/herself or others. Psychiatrists licensed in the State of Maryland, or psychologists who are licensed under the Maryland Psychologists Act and listed in the National Register of Health Service Providers in Psychology may complete a petition. Other staff members or family members can complete a petition but the petition must then be taken to a District Court. Petition for Emergency Evaluation forms are kept in the Security Office and the Hearing Coordinator's office, Division of Quality and Evaluation Services.

b. The police officer, upon locating the patient, determines that the patient meets the legal criteria for an emergency evaluation. In this case the officer will complete the Petition for Emergency Evaluation.

If either of the above (a or b) occurs, the police will be responsible for transporting the patient to a designated emergency facility. (Your Health System) Security will then be notified. The Hospital will be responsible for coordinating efforts with the emergency facility.

c. If the patient does not meet the criteria for emergency evaluation, the officer will only notify Hospital Security as to the patient's whereabouts and ask the patient if he or she would like to return voluntarily. If the patient wishes to return voluntarily, the Patient will arrange his or her own transportation or will call the hospital to provide transportation. If the patient does not wish to return, the officer can take no further action.

4. If the patient returns without Police involvement, Security must be notified immediately so that they can inform the Police Department.

## II. Child and Adolescent Patient

A. If a patient has been signed into the Hospital by his or her parents and elopes, the officer responding to (Your Health System) will make a report and send a teletype requesting custody. If the child is located, his or her parents will be contacted to respond to take custody of the child. It is then the parents' responsibility to return the child to the Hospital. The treating therapist or designee will determine if (Your Health System) staff shall be involved in the return of the child to the Hospital.

B. If the patient is undergoing treatment at the Hospital by some type of court order or commitment order and elopes, he or she can be taken into custody as a runaway. The patient is considered an involuntary patient and procedures regarding a missing involuntary patient apply. If the patient is also under the jurisdiction of a probation officer the probation officer should be immediately notified of the patient's elopement and wherever possible become involved in any police intervention to assure the patient's return to the Hospital.

C. If a child or adolescent patient elopes and is discharged prior to being located, Hospital Security must be contacted immediately so that they can contact the Police Department.

### Additional Policy Reference:

- Hospital Boundaries for Inpatients

### Cross-Reference Listing:

Elopement; Involuntary; Voluntary

### Review and Revision History:

8/1/93 5/7/90 3/27/89 11/12/85