

§ 17.33 Patients' rights., 38 C.F.R. § 17.33

Code of Federal Regulations

Title 38. Pensions, Bonuses, and Veterans' Relief

Chapter I. Department of Veterans Affairs (Refs & Annos) Part 17. Medical (Refs & Annos)

Protection of Patient Rights

(a) General.

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§ 17.33 Patients' rights.

Effective: December 5, 2005 Currentness

(1) Patients have a right to be treated with dignity in a humane environment that affords them both reasonable protection from harm and appropriate privacy with regard to their personal needs.

(2) Patients have a right to receive, to the extent of eligibility therefor under the law, prompt and appropriate treatment for any physical or emotional disability.

(3) Patients have the right to the least restrictive conditions necessary to achieve treatment purposes.

(4) No patient in the Department of Veterans Affairs medical care system, except as otherwise provided by the applicable State law, shall be denied legal rights solely by virtue of being voluntarily admitted or involuntarily committed. Such legal rights include, but are not limited to, the following:

(i) The right to hold and to dispose of property except as may be limited in accordance with paragraph (c)(2) of this section; (ii) The right to execute legal instruments (e.g., will);

(iii) The right to enter into contractual relationships;

(iv) The right to register and vote;

(v) The right to marry and to obtain a separation, divorce, or annulment;

(vi) The right to hold a professional, occupational, or vehicle operator's license.

(b) Residents and inpatients. Subject to paragraphs (c) and (d) of this section, patients admitted on a residential or inpatient care basis to the Department of Veterans Affairs medical care system have the following rights:

(1) Visitations and communications. Each patient has the right to communicate freely and privately with persons outside the facility, including government officials, attorneys, and clergymen. To facilitate these communications each patient shall be provided the opportunity to meet with visitors during regularly scheduled visiting hours, convenient and reasonable access to public telephones for making and receiving phone calls, and the opportunity to send and receive unopened mail.

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(i) Communications with attorneys, law enforcement agencies, or government officials and representatives of recognized service organizations when the latter are acting as agents for the patient in a matter concerning Department of Veterans Affairs benefits, shall not be reviewed.

(ii) A patient may refuse visitors.

(iii) If a patient's right to receive unopened mail is restricted pursuant to paragraph (c) of this section, the patient shall be required to open the sealed mail while in the presence of an appropriate person for the sole purpose of ascertaining whether the mail contains contraband material, i.e., implements which pose significant risk of bodily harm to the patient or others or any drugs or medication. Any such material will be held for the patient or disposed of in accordance with instructions concerning patients' mail published by the Veterans Health Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs, and/or the local health care facility.

(iv) Each patient shall be afforded the opportunity to purchase, at the patient's expense, letter writing material including stamps. In the event a patient needs assistance in purchasing writing material, or in writing, reading or sending mail, the medical facility will attempt, at the patient's request, to provide such assistance by means of volunteers, sufficient to mail at least one (1) letter each week.

(v) All information gained by staff personnel of a medical facility during the course of assisting a patient in writing, reading, or sending mail is to be kept strictly confidential except for any disclosure required by law.

(2) Clothing. Each patient has the right to wear his or her own clothing.

(3) Personal Possessions. Each patient has the right to keep and use his or her own personal possessions consistent with available space, governing fire safety regulations, restrictions on noise, and restrictions on possession of contraband material, drugs and medications.

(4) Money. Each patient has the right to keep and spend his or her own money and to have access to funds in his or her account in accordance with instructions concerning personal funds of patients published by the Veterans Health Administration.

(5) Social Interaction. Each patient has the right to social interaction with others.

(6) Exercise. Each patient has the right to regular physical exercise and to be outdoors at regular and frequent intervals. Facilities and equipment for such exercise shall be provided.

(7) Worship. The opportunity for religious worship shall be made available to each patient who desires such opportunity. No patient will be coerced into engaging in any religious activities against his or her desires.

(c) Restrictions.

(1) A right set forth in paragraph (b) of this section may be restricted within the patient's treatment plan by written order signed by the appropriate health care professional if--

(i) It is determined pursuant to paragraph (c)(2) of this section that a valid and sufficient reason exists for a restriction, and

(ii) The order imposing the restriction and a progress note detailing the indications therefor are both entered into the patient's permanent medical record.

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(2) For the purpose of paragraph (c) of this section, a valid and sufficient reason exists when, after consideration of pertinent facts, including the patient's history, current condition and prognosis, a health care professional reasonably believes that the full exercise of the specific right would--

(i) Adversely affect the patient's physical or mental health,

(ii) Under prevailing community standards, likely stigmatize the patient's reputation to a degree that would adversely affect the patient's return to independent living,

(iii) Significantly infringe upon the rights of or jeopardize the health or safety of others,
or

(iv) Have a significant adverse impact on the operation of the medical facility, to such an extent that the patient's exercise of the specific right should be restricted. In determining whether a patient's specific right should be restricted, the health care professional concerned must determine that the likelihood and seriousness of the consequences that are expected to result from the full exercise of the right are so compelling as to warrant the restriction. The Chief of Service or Chief of Staff, as designated by local policy, should concur with the decision to impose such restriction. In this connection, it should be noted that there is no intention to imply that each of the reasons specified in paragraphs (c)(2)(i) through (iv) of this section are logically relevant to each of the rights set forth in paragraph (b)(1) of this section.

(3) If it has been determined under paragraph (c)(2) of this section that a valid and sufficient reason exists for restricting any of the patient's rights set forth in paragraph (b) of this section, the least restrictive method for protecting the interest or interests specified in paragraphs (c)(2)(i) through (iv) of this section that are involved shall be employed.

(4) The patient must be promptly notified of any restriction imposed under paragraph (c) of this section and the reasons therefor.

(5) All restricting orders under paragraph (c) of this section must be reviewed at least once every 30 days by the practitioner and must be concurred in by the Chief of Service or Chief of Staff.

(d) Restraint and seclusion of patients.

(1) Each patient has the right to be free from physical restraint or seclusion except in situations in which there is a substantial risk of imminent harm by the patient to himself, herself, or others and less restrictive means of preventing such harm have been determined to be inappropriate or insufficient. Patients will be physically restrained or placed in seclusion only on the written order of an appropriate licensed health care professional. The reason for any restraint order will be clearly documented in the progress notes of the patient's medical record. The written order may be entered on the basis of telephonic authority, but in such an event, an appropriate licensed health care professional must examine the patient and sign a written order within an appropriate timeframe that is in compliance with current community and/or accreditation standards. In emergency situations, where inability to contact an appropriate licensed health care professional prior to restraint is likely to result in immediate harm to the patient or others, the patient may be temporarily restrained by a member of the staff until appropriate authorization can be received from an appropriate licensed health care professional. Use

of restraints or seclusion may continue for a period of time that does not exceed current community and/or accreditation standards, within which time an appropriate licensed health care professional shall again be consulted to determine if continuance of such restraint or seclusion is required. Restraint or seclusion may not be used as a punishment, for the convenience of staff, or as a substitute for treatment programs.

(2) While in restraint or seclusion, the patient must be seen within appropriate timeframes in compliance with current community and/or accreditation standards:

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(i) By an appropriate health care professional who will monitor and chart the patient's physical and mental condition; and (ii) By other ward personnel as frequently as is reasonable under existing circumstances.

(3) Each patient in restraint or seclusion shall have bathroom privileges according to his or her needs.

(4) Each patient in restraint or seclusion shall have the opportunity to bathe at least every twenty-four (24) hours.

(5) Each patient in restraint or seclusion shall be provided nutrition and fluid appropriately.

(e) Medication. Patients have a right to be free from unnecessary or excessive medication. Except in an emergency, medication will be administered only on a written order of an appropriate health care professional in that patient's medical record. The written order may be entered on the basis of telephonic authority received from an appropriate health care professional, but in such event, the written order must be countersigned by an appropriate health care professional within 24 hours of the ordering of the medication. An appropriate health care professional will be responsible for all medication given or administered to a patient. A review by an appropriate health care professional of the drug regimen of each inpatient shall take place at least every thirty (30) days. It is recognized that administration of certain medications will be reviewed more frequently. Medication shall not be used as punishment, for the convenience of the staff, or in quantities which interfere with the patient's treatment program.

(f) Confidentiality. Information gained by staff from the patient or the patient's medical record will be kept confidential and will not be disclosed except in accordance with applicable law.

(g) Patient grievances. Each patient has the right to present grievances with respect to perceived infringement of the rights described in this section or concerning any other matter on behalf of himself, herself or others, to staff members at the facility in which the

patient is receiving care, other Department of Veterans Affairs officials, government officials, members of Congress or any other person without fear or reprisal.

(h) Notice of patient's rights. Upon the admission of any patient, the patient or his/her representative shall be informed of the rights described in this section, shall be given a copy of a statement of those rights and shall be informed of the fact that the statement of rights is posted at each nursing station. All staff members assigned to work with patients will be given a copy of the statement of rights and these rights will be discussed with them by their immediate supervisor.

(i) Other rights. The rights described in this section are in addition to and not in derogation of any statutory, constitutional or other legal rights.

(Authority: 38 U.S.C. 501, 1721)

Credits

[47 FR 55486, Dec. 10, 1982; 61 FR 21965, May 13, 1996; 70 FR 67094, Nov. 4, 2005]
SOURCE: 54 FR 34978, Aug. 23, 1989; 57 FR 31015–31018, July 13, 1992; 57 FR 38610, Aug. 26, 1992; 57 FR 41701, Sept. 11, 1992; 59 FR 28265, June 1, 1994; 59 FR 49579, Sept. 29, 1994; 59 FR 53355, Oct. 24, 1994; 61 FR 21965, May 13, 1996; 70 FR 71774, Nov. 30, 2005; 73 FR 65553, Nov. 4, 2008; 74 FR 30228, June 25, 2009; 75 FR 69883, Nov. 16, 2010, unless otherwise noted.

AUTHORITY: 38 U.S.C. 501, and as noted in specific sections.

Notes of Decisions (20)

Current through March 1, 2012; 77 FR 12695.