

Further information

A list of useful contacts is contained in the 'Welcome to the ward' leaflet you have been given. If you need any further information please don't hesitate to ask a member of staff who will be happy to help.

If you need help to understand this leaflet or would like it in a different language or format (such as large print, Braille or audio) please ask a member of staff.

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Your rights and responsibilities as an informal patient



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Agreeing to come into hospital

As an informal patient you have agreed to come into hospital voluntarily and be a patient on this ward. It is likely that you know you are unwell and need to be given help and support.

On the ward you will sometimes be referred to as an informal or voluntary patient because you are not detained under the Mental Health Act 1983 (MHA).

Because of this, you have certain rights during your stay on the ward. Equally, you have some responsibilities as well.

This leaflet will explain what those rights and responsibilities are so that you understand what they mean for you.

Your responsibilities as an informal patient

Accepting and agreeing to these responsibilities will ensure that your time on the ward is well spent and so enable you to return to your own home as soon as possible.

On admission to the ward, you will be encouraged to participate fully with your named nurse and other members of the clinical care team in the development of your own treatment plan. This ultimately leads up to preparing you for your planned discharge from hospital.

Participation includes:

- Being actively involved in your own treatment plan, including therapeutic activities on the ward
- Sharing any concerns about your treatment with your care team

Your rights as an informal patient

As an informal patient you will have agreed to a care plan for your stay on the ward. This may include provisions for your own safety or the protection of others, depending on the assessment by your clinical care team. You may, for example, be asked to agree to an observation schedule (how regularly a member of staff checks on you), and possibly not to leave the ward or to have certain other restrictions which the staff will be happy to explain and discuss the reasons why with you. You are not, however, subject to any statutory powers to compel you to stay on the ward.

If you disagree with a proposed care plan, you can discuss this with your care team. There are a number of options open to you at that point:

- that your care plan is altered and mutually agreed
- that you mutually decide that discharge is appropriate
- that you cannot agree and you self discharge
- that you cannot agree and the care team discharge you

Sometimes, in the interests of your safety or the safety of others, an emergency detention under the Mental Health Act (Section 5) is carried out and this means you remain in hospital, at least for the immediate time being. Staff in psychiatric wards have this authority in recognition that they have a duty of care to protect the people they are looking after, even if the person has come into hospital on a voluntary basis. At the same time, the Code of Practice for the Mental Health Act makes it clear that we should look after people using the 'least restriction', which includes avoiding detention under the Mental Health Act if possible.

You cannot be forced to remain in hospital against your will for any significant length of time unless you have been detained under the Mental Health Act.

Discharge

If you are discharging yourself then, following further discussion with you, you will be asked to sign a Discharge Against Medical Advice form. However, this is not compulsory.

On discharge, you may be offered follow-up care in the community. Your discharge plan will be given to you and a copy sent to your GP. Your family and carers might have to be informed so that support arrangements can be put into place.

Medication for you to take home may need to be organised.

If you are detained under the Mental Health Act

If clinical staff consider your decision to leave may be unwise they will explain their concerns to you. They will also do this if they are concerned about other aspects of your care plan that you disagree with. If they believe there is no alternative, they may prevent you from leaving under Section 5 of the Mental Health Act. This will allow time for a Mental Health Act Assessment to be completed which may in turn lead to a possible further detention in hospital. If this should happen, your rights will be explained to you in detail.