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| <b>Vermont Psychiatric Care Hospital Policy and Procedure</b> |                        |                              |
| <b>Elopement Policy</b>                                       |                        |                              |
| Effective: July 2014  | Revised: December 2024 | Due to Review: December 2026 |

**POLICY**

The Vermont Psychiatric Care Hospital (VPCH) shall take measures to prevent hospitalized persons from leaving the hospital and/or the company of VPCH personnel without authorization and to pursue the safe and timely return of individuals who leave without authorization. The following procedure outlines measures that VPCH personnel shall take if elopement has or is suspected to have occurred.

**DEFINITIONS**

Elopement: When a hospitalized person has or is suspected of having left secure areas of VPCH without authorization, left the company of authorized personnel, and/or is otherwise unaccounted for.

**PROCEDURE**

If a hospitalized person attempts to elope from VPCH, personnel shall act to prevent the elopement if this can be done safely. If elopement has occurred or cannot safely be prevented, personnel shall follow the procedures described here forth.

- If hospital personnel become aware or suspect that a hospitalized individual has eloped, they shall immediately notify the on-duty Nursing Supervisor and an on-duty Admissions personnel if applicable, of the known or suspected elopement. This notification shall include a general description of the individual (age, approximate height, weight, complexion, hair color, medical needs, etc.), the individual’s likely direction, the clothing the individual was wearing, approximate time of elopement, and any safety concerns for consideration.
- The on-duty Nurse Supervisor shall facilitate a response that includes a hospital wide account of hospitalized individuals and personnel while a search plan is organized and implemented.
  - Consider using teams of 2+ personnel to conduct such searches.
  - Consider developing a strategic search plan beginning with the area last seen and based on the presenting circumstances and available information.
  - Radio communication can be utilized as the on-duty Nurse Supervisor determines is necessary/appropriate.
- Upon notification, the on-duty Supervisor or Admissions designee, shall:
  - Alert others as indicated in the Elopement Notification steps of this procedure and report information pertinent to the individual’s condition and possible location.
  - Monitor/review hospital wide cameras as indicated to assist with prompt location of the unaccounted-for individual.

- If the hospitalized person is not located promptly, the on-duty Nursing Supervisor or designee shall notify the individual's provider or the on-duty provider. Law enforcement should be notified at this point to aid with the search.
- The on-duty Nursing Supervisor will check the person's medical record to determine whether there are others that need to be notified (*i.e.*, guardians, etc.) and will collaborate with the on-duty provider to complete necessary notifications.
  - If there is a concern the elopement may also be a potential duty to warn situation (*i.e.*, the individual presents a serious and imminent risk to an identifiable victim), notification of such shall be immediately conveyed to either the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), their designee, or the administrator on call. After consultation with Department of Mental Health (DMH) General Counsel, a duty to warn would be made by the CEO, their designee, the administrator on call, or a designated member of the DMH legal team.
- If the hospitalized person is located outside of a secure hospital area or away from hospital grounds, personnel shall provide verbal encouragement to autonomously return to the secure areas of the facility. The on-duty Nurse Supervisor should be notified of the individual's condition and location. If it can be done safely, personnel shall maintain visual contact with the hospitalized individual for the sole purpose of reporting updates on condition and location.

### **Elopement from Escort**

- If escorting personnel become aware of or suspect that an individual has eloped from an off-campus escort, personnel shall immediately call 911, notify the operator of the circumstance, pertinent information including the individual's likely direction, the clothing the individual was wearing, approximate time of elopement, and any safety concerns for consideration, and follow instruction provided by the 911 operator.
- After providing the 911 operator with the pertinent information, the on-duty Nurse Supervisor shall be notified and briefed accordingly.
- If there is a concern the elopement may also be a potential duty to warn situation (*i.e.*, the individual presents a serious and imminent risk to an identifiable victim), notification of such shall be immediately conveyed to either the CEO, their designee, or the administrator on call. After consultation with DMH General Counsel, a duty to warn would be made by the CEO, their designee, the administrator on call, or a designated member of the legal team.
- If the hospitalized person is located by VPCH personnel, personnel shall provide verbal encouragement to autonomously return to the facility. The on-duty Nurse Supervisor and emergency personnel should be notified of the individual's condition and location. If it can be done safely, personnel shall maintain visual contact with the hospitalized individual for the sole purpose of reporting updates on condition and location.

### **Elopement Notifications**

- The on-duty Supervisor shall begin documenting the elopement on the *Elopement Form* (available on the VPCH SharePoint site) upon learning that a hospitalized individual is unaccounted for. This task may also be delegated to the admissions personnel on duty.

- If determined to be prudent, emergency responders shall be notified of the known/suspected elopement.
- The on-duty Supervisor shall follow and/or communicate any directions provided by any involved emergency responders.
- The following individuals shall also be notified of any known or suspected elopement as soon as reasonably possible:
  - VPCH Chief Executive Officer or designee
  - VPCH Executive Medical Director or designee
  - DMH Administrator on call
  - DMH General Counsel
  - If the unaccounted for individual has a guardian, the on-duty provider or the Nurse Supervisor shall inform the guardian about the suspected elopement.
- Communications about elopements shall be completed by the Nurse Supervisor, or delegated to the Admissions Specialist on duty unless otherwise specified in this policy.

### **Notification of Elopement to Officials**

The Director of Quality, or designee, shall conduct a review of any elopement. The Director of Quality, or designee, shall send a copy of the *Department of Mental Health Critical Incident Reporting Form* (available on the VPCH SharePoint site), to:

Vermont Department of Mental Health  
166 Horseshoe Drive – Weeks Building  
Waterbury, Vermont 05671-2010

Patient Safety and Surveillance Improvement System  
Vermont Program for Quality in Healthcare  
132 Main Street  
Montpelier, Vermont 05602

Survey and Certification  
Division of Licensing and Protection  
1-888-700-5330

No other communication regarding this event should be communicated external to VPCH or DMH other than the required reports above. If an external source is inquiring about the event, they must be directed to the DMH Commissioner's office.

### **Return from Elopement**

When an individual returns from elopement or the suspected elopement is otherwise resolved:

- The attending provider or, if applicable, the on-call provider, shall assess the hospitalized person and enter a progress note in the medical record. Personnel shall conduct a safety search pursuant to VPCH policy.


- If circumstances are such that the individual is not returned to VPCH, discharge procedures may commence.
- The on-duty Supervisor shall inform previously notified parties that the individual has been returned to VPCH or that the elopement has been otherwise resolved.

**Documentation**

- The on-duty Supervisor or designee shall ensure that a Corresponding Event Report(s) is completed.
- The on-duty Nursing Supervisor or designee shall ensure that the *Elopement Form* and a High-Risk Event note with a complete description of the event is documented.
- A documented debrief with involved personnel and other stakeholders as deemed appropriate by the on-duty Nurse Supervisor. This may be done in accordance with VPCH policy for Root Cause Analysis. Documents/documentation relevant to the elopement shall be provided to the VPCH Quality Director or their designee.

**REFERENCES**

18 V.S.A. § 7105, the Arrest of eloped persons.  
<https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/18/171/07105>

| Approved by   | Signature  | Date      |
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| Emily Hawes,<br>Commissioner,<br>Vermont Department of<br>Mental Health |  <p>DocuSigned by:<br/>Emily Hawes<br/>C50275615A62462...</p> | 12/5/2024 |