

# Vermont Psychiatric Care Hospital Procedure

## Hospital Telephone Use

New: X

Date: 11/5/2015

### Purpose

To outline the responsibilities of VPCH employees involved in answering VPCH telephones from outside callers.

### Definitions

“Patient” means any individual who is, was, or is about to be a person receiving mental health treatment at VPCH.

“Phone” means any telephone at VPCH that is owned by VPCH but does not include VPCH cell phones.

“VPCH Staff” means any VPCH employee, contract employee, authorized student or trainee, or other individual who works at or for VPCH on a regular basis.

### Procedure

#### I. Admission and Reception Office Responsibilities

A. Reception and Admission staff may exercise their discretion in providing information to callers from the following organizations, if the caller is known to the staff answering the call:

- Department of Mental Health
- State Sheriff’s Departments
- Vermont State Police
- Disability Rights Vermont
- Vermont Legal Aid
- Vermont Designated Hospitals
- Vermont Designated Agencies or known service provider
- Vermont State Courts
- VPCH Patient Representative

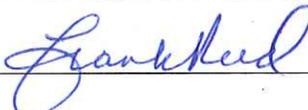
B. With the exception of calls referenced in section A. above, whenever calls come to Reception or Admissions requesting to speak with a patient or seeking information about an individual who is a patient at VPCH, Reception and Admissions staff shall say, “One moment please,” and transfer the call to that patient’s unit.

C. If the person is not a patient at VPCH, inform the caller that the person is not a patient at VPCH.

- D. At no time shall Admissions or Reception staff make any comment about the status of a patient.
- E. When Reception or Admissions staff is uncertain about how to handle a call, transfer that call to the Nursing Supervisor.

II. Nursing Responsibilities

- A. The Director of Nursing or designee shall provide generic scripts to guide unit staff in responding to phone calls to the patient care units asking to speak with a patient or seeking information about a patient. These scripts shall be kept in the Nurses Station to assure accessibility and shall be attached to this procedure as Attachment A.
- B. Each patient shall be encouraged to document her/his preferences regarding incoming telephone calls on a Confirming Patient Status Authorization Form. Completed forms shall be kept in the Nurses Station to assure accessibility.
- C. Staff shall answer the phone in such a manner as to maintain the confidentiality of patients.
- D. Staff shall facilitate communication between patients and their friends, family and support people, and assist in creating a system that fosters ease of access between those individuals and the person hospitalized.

Approved by	Signature	Date
Frank Reed, Commissioner of DMH		11/29/16

ATTACHMENT A

VERMONT PSYCHIATRIC CARE HOSPITAL  
TELEPHONE ANSWERING SCRIPTS

**General Guidelines**

- If you are not sure of the patient's preferences, check the Confirming Patient Status Authorization Form in the loose leaf notebook.
- CHECK THE VISUAL DISPLAY BOARD / WHITE BOARD for special instructions.
- When you have a caller on the line and are checking the patient's authorization form or speaking with other staff members about the patient, put the phone on mute.
- If a patient refuses a call from a family member or other person in a close relationship to that patient, document that in a progress note.

TYPE OF CALL	GENERAL RULE	EXAMPLE
CALL FOR PATIENT WHO ACCEPTS ALL CALLS	Inform the patient of the call and transfer to the patient phone.	<p><u>Unit Staff:</u> B Unit, (First name) speaking.</p> <p><u>Caller:</u> I'd like to speak with patient X.</p> <p><u>Staff:</u> One moment please. <i>Inform the patient that s/he has a call coming to the patient phone. Transfer the call to the patient phone.</i></p>
CALL FOR PATIENT WHO DOES NOT ACCEPT ANY CALLS	<u>Do not reveal any information about whether or not the patient is at VPCH.</u>	<p><u>Unit Staff:</u> B Unit, (First name) speaking.</p> <p><u>Caller:</u> I'd like to speak with patient X.</p> <p><u>Staff:</u> I'm sorry but I can neither confirm nor deny that this person is here. I will transfer your call to a social worker. <i>Transfer the call to the assigned social worker. In no SW is assigned, transfer to Becky or another SW.</i></p>
CALL TO RECEPTION OR ADMISSIONS FOR A PERSON EXPECTED TO BE ADMITTED LATER	Reception or Admissions staff transfer the call to the Nursing Supervisor	<p><u>Supervisor:</u> <i>if you know when the person is expected to arrive, encourage the caller to call back when the person is likely to be available.</i></p>

<p>CALLER ASKS STAFF TO SHARE INFORMATION ABOUT THE PATIENT'S CONDITION OR ASKS STAFF TO EXPLAIN WHY THE PATIENT IS NOT AVAILABLE AT THIS TIME.</p>	<p><u>Unit staff may not convey information about patient condition or current activity to callers.</u></p> <p>If patient is currently not available and staff member knows when patient is likely to be available, staff may let the caller know when would be a good time to call back.</p> <p>Avoid taking messages for patients from callers – encourage caller to call back later.</p>	<p><u>Unit Staff:</u> B Unit, (First name) speaking.</p> <p><u>Caller:</u> I'd like to speak with patient X.</p> <p><u>Unit Staff:</u> <i>When patient is not available:</i> X is not available. You are welcome to call back later.</p> <p><u>Caller:</u> Why isn't (patient) available? When will s/he be available?</p> <p><u>Staff:</u> <u><i>Do not answer "why not available" question as that is privileged information.</i></u></p> <p><i>Practice good customer service and encourage the caller to call back later when the patient is likely to be available. If you know when the patient is likely to be available, let the caller know when to call.</i></p> <p><i>If the caller becomes demanding or argumentative, practice good customer service - I'm sorry but there is no other information I can share. You are welcome to call back later. (Repeat as necessary)</i></p>
<p>CALLER ASKS RECEPTION OR ADMISSIONS TO SPEAK WITH A PERSON WHO IS NOT CURRENTLY A PATIENT AT VPCH - MAY BE SOMEONE WHO HAS BEEN DISCHARGED OR SOMEONE NEVER HOSPITALIZED AT VPCH</p>	<p>Reception or Admissions staff respond to the caller</p>	<p><u>Reception or Admissions staff:</u> answer in usual manner</p> <p><u>Caller:</u> I'd like to speak with patient X.</p> <p><u>Reception/Admissions:</u> That person is not a patient at this hospital.</p> <p><u>Caller:</u> Where is he/she? I know they were there recently.</p> <p><u>Reception/Admissions:</u> I'm sorry but I do not have any additional information.</p>