

Chief Psychiatrist's Advisory Notice

Chief Psychiatrist's guideline – "Criteria for searches to maintain safety in an inpatient unit – for patients, visitors and staff"

May 2018

Purpose

- The Chief Psychiatrist has previously issued the guidelines - Criteria for searches to maintain safety in an inpatient unit – for patients, visitors and staff.
- Recently the Victorian Coroner issued a recommendation to the Chief Psychiatrist in relation to the search of electronic devices such as Kindles for dangerous items e.g. razor blades hidden in the cover of such devices.
- The Chief Psychiatrist is issuing this advisory notice to alert the mental health services to update their policies for appropriate search in inpatient units of electronic devices such as kindles, tablets, mobile phones and laptops for any dangerous items hidden in their cover.

Background

- A young woman was admitted to High Dependency Unit of an acute inpatient unit. She presented with suicidal thoughts and was a compulsory patient under the *Mental Health Act, 2014*.
- As part of admission process, her property was searched and several items including her Kindle, were removed. Later in the day, she asked for her Kindle to be returned and it was provided to her.
- Next day early morning, on a routine nursing observation check she was discovered in a pool of blood in the ensuite of her bedroom. A code blue was called but she could not be resuscitated. The cause of death was hypovolaemic shock as a result of incised injury to the wrist using a razor blade.
- The Coroner's investigation confirmed that the patient had previously secreted the razor blade in the cover of a Kindle in her possession. The razor blade was not discovered in a search of her belongings upon admission to the inpatient unit.

Recommendation

- Mental health services must inform their staff about appropriate search of all electronic devices for dangerous items such as razor blades or other sharp objects.
- The search should include removal of electronic items from their cover to identify any dangerous items.
- Mental health services should update their policies and procedures accordingly.

Noted with
much interest!
J 3-5-18



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