



## MONTANA STATE HOSPITAL POLICY AND PROCEDURE

### PATIENT VISITATION

**Effective Date:** September 5, 2014

**Policy:** ADM-08

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- I. PURPOSE:** To provide guidelines for staff and persons visiting patients. The guidelines are intended to maximize the benefit of patient visitation to all concerned by supporting the therapeutic role of Montana State Hospital (MSH), honoring all patients' right to privacy, and protecting the safety of all patients, staff, and visitors.
  
- II. POLICY:**
  - A. All patients have the right to visitation unless a patient's treatment team imposes special restrictions in writing when such restrictions are clinically indicated. The restrictions must be reviewed periodically to see if they need to be continued. The restrictions do not include visits with patient attorney, advocate, or legal representative. §§ 53-21-142 (4), (15) and (16), MCA.
  
  - B. MSH will make every effort to accommodate visitors when clinically appropriate. MSH's normal visiting hours are from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m., seven days a week.
  
  - C. MSH recognizes and supports a patient's right to visits. Visits from family members, friends, and other supportive individuals enhance the treatment provided by the Hospital and increase the prospects for the patient's successful return to the community. Additionally, Montana's mental health statutes, Title 53, Chapter 21, Montana Code Annotated, recognize a patient's right to visitation. The guidelines for visiting are intended to support a safe and therapeutic environment for patients, visitors, and hospital staff. MSH reserves the right to place conditions on visits to prevent interference with patient treatment or minimize risk to staff, patients, or visitors.
  
  - D. To support a therapeutic environment and promote recovery and independence, recently discharged patients will not be allowed to visit current patients or staff for 45 days following discharge. If a former patient wishes to visit a current patient more than 45 days following discharge they will be asked to submit a written request to the patient's treatment team and or the hospital administrator. Discharged patients who submit a request to visit should allow at least one week for review of the request. The Hospital's discharge technician will review this expectation with all discharging patients and will supply patients who wish to request visitation a form to fill out and submit to a treatment team or the hospital administrator. In the event that a recently discharged patient has a family member admitted to MSH, the treating Licensed Independent Practitioner may authorize a visit by the recently discharged patient if such a visit is judged to be beneficial.

The Licensed Independent Practitioner would note the authorization in the chart and communicate the same to the treatment team, the house supervisor, the front desk, and security.

**III. DEFINITIONS:**

A. **Visitors:** Visitors are family, friends, clergy, attorneys, physicians, representatives of the Board of Visitors or a qualified protection and advocacy system, and spiritual counselors who wish to visit patients while they are hospitalized at MSH.

B. **Visiting Guidelines:** Visiting guidelines are provided to each visitor to promote understanding of:

1. The behaviors expected from each visitor;
2. Expectations of patients during visits;
3. Expectations the visitors can have of staff at the hospital to support a private and productive visit.

C. **Types of Visits:** The Hospital has two types of visits that are allowed: contact visits and non-contact visits. **Contact visits** are face to face visits between the visitor and the patient in a place that protects auditory privacy. **Non-Contact Visits** are by phone or video system. Privilege levels determine visit type. Each unit may adopt a level system which includes the opportunity for each patient to advance from non-contact to contact visits as treatment progresses and security needs are met.

D. **Visitors Identification Badge:** The Hospital will provide a dated visitor's badge for each visitor at the time the visitor signs in. All visitors must wear an approved identification badge in plain view on the front of their clothing during the entire visit. Staff will collect each badge when the visitor checks out after the visit. The badge will contain the following information:

1. The word "VISITOR" in plainly visible large type;
2. Date and time of visit;
3. Name of visitor; and
4. Location of visit.

Official employee identification cards will be sufficient identifying information for staff and authorized agents of the Montana Mental Disabilities Board of Visitors or a designated protection and advocacy system. This information will be used as the basis to approve the visitor onto the patient unit and it will also be used to secure the patient's advanced permission for a visit.

E. **Expectations of Visitors:** All visitors are expected to meet the following expectations:

1. Call in advance to allow adequate time for hospital staff to identify visit times that do not interfere with scheduled treatment time and confirm patient acceptance of visit;

2. Check in at the front reception desk in the main hospital upon arrival at MSH;
3. Obtain and wear a dated visitor badge and return it when leaving; and
4. Honor all visiting guidelines and cooperate with staff directions and requests.

**IV. RESPONSIBILITIES:**

- A. ***Social Workers*** for each patient are responsible for informing patients and family of the patient visitation policy and practices to improve understanding of the proper patient visitation process and to maximize appropriate access.
- B. ***Front Desk Staff*** in the main hospital entrance are responsible for signing in each visitor, notifying treatment unit staff, securing unit clearance for visit, confirming patient consent, providing a locker for disallowed items, and issuing a visitor badge.
- C. ***Program Managers and Nursing Supervisors*** are responsible for ensuring patient visits occur as provided under this policy. The Program Manager or Nurse Supervisor is also responsible to ensure the treatment team honors the patient's right to refuse visitors.
- D. ***Licensed Independent Practitioners*** are responsible for documenting, in the medical record, justification for any conditions on a patient's visitation, or permission for visits on Hospital grounds or the canteen, off-campus, in treatment units or in patient rooms. They are also responsible for reviewing the treatment plan for modification as appropriate.
- E. ***Psychiatric Technicians*** are responsible for reviewing and accounting for items given to the patient during a visit. Any property or money received will be recorded and managed as required by MSH Policy AD-03, "Management of Patient's Personal Effects".
- F. ***Staff on Unit*** are responsible for documenting the patient visit in the chart, including who visited, relationship to patient, duration, location, and any other pertinent facts about the visit.

**V. PROCEDURE:**

- A. ***Visiting hours*** are from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m., seven days per week. Staff members will inform visitors of the patient's needs to participate in scheduled activities and the time when the patient will be available. Visits will be scheduled at times which do not interfere with the patient's scheduled treatment programs or meals, unless unique circumstances exist. To protect all patients' privacy, visits will occur in designated visitation areas which will be identified at the time of the visit.

- B. **Visitors will check in** at the Front Desk area in the entrance to the main hospital upon arrival on the MSH campus. On a hospital-provided form the visitors will enter the name of the patient they wish to visit, the appointment time if they have called in advance, their relationship to the patient, items they wish to give to patient, if any, and estimated time needed for the visit. Visits normally last 30 minutes each.

After receiving this information from the visitor, the front desk will call the unit, state the name and relationship of the planned visitor, gift items being cleared for possible gifting, confirm the appointment and provide estimated duration of visit. While the front desk is providing the proposed visit information/details to the unit, visitors will receive the attached “Montana State Hospital General Visiting Guidelines”.

Each visitor will sign an acknowledgement that they have reviewed the visiting guidelines and will abide by them. The unit will confirm the patient’s acceptance of the visit and that the planned visit does not interfere with scheduled therapy. The unit will also confirm availability of private meeting space.

After receiving the signed form from the visitor accepting MSH visiting guidelines, the front desk staff will provide the visitor with a dated visitor badge and ensure it is attached to the front of the visitor’s clothing in plain view. The front desk staff will direct the visitor to the location of the planned visit. If necessary, the visitor will be escorted to the visit location.

- C. **Visiting Areas** include visiting rooms that are available on or near each unit and in several areas of the Hospital. The Main Hospital Rotunda may be used as a visiting area. Other accommodations will be made available as needed.

Visitors may enter patient treatment units only when permission is granted by the treating Licensed Independent Practitioner, or as permitted under MSH Policy ADA-13, “Access to Patients and Treatment Areas by Designated Protection and Advocacy System”. Visits may take place in conference rooms on treatment units, when necessary and clinically appropriate. Visits may not take place in individual patient rooms, observation rooms, or in seclusion and restraint areas, unless specifically ordered by the treating Licensed Independent Practitioner as medically necessary.

Visits may take place on the Hospital grounds or the canteen if authorized by the treating Licensed Independent Practitioner. Visitors wishing to take a patient off-grounds must make arrangements in advance. A documented Licensed Independent Practitioner’s order is required for off-grounds visits.

All visiting areas may be monitored visually for security purposes. In all cases, the privacy rights of other patients must be respected.

- D. ***Patients have the right to refuse visitors or discontinue a visit at any time.***  
 When patients refuse visitors, staff from the patient’s treatment program will explain the circumstances to the visiting party and document in the clinical record the visitor’s identity and the patient’s refusal.
- E. ***Staff members will make reasonable efforts to meet with visitors when requested.*** Visitors should schedule appointments with staff in advance whenever possible. No employee may disclose Protected Health Information or other private information about any patient without appropriate written authorization for each patient involved. Any employee may decline to meet with a visitor when in the employee’s professional judgment such a meeting would be inappropriate. Employees who have concerns about a request for a meeting with a visitor are instructed to seek supervisory guidance.
- F. ***Forensic Unit Visitors*** – Visits with patients on the Forensic Unit (D Unit) are subject to the security provisions of Policy FP-04, “Forensic (D-wing) Security Procedures”. The Forensic Treatment Team may place conditions on the visits of individual patients on forensic commitments for the purpose of maintaining security and preventing the introduction of contraband on the unit. When this need is indicated, visits will be non-contact and will take place in the designated location on the Forensic Treatment Unit. The unit Licensed Independent Practitioner must document in the medical record justification for such conditions.
- G. ***Visitors Will Be Asked To Limit What They Bring To Patient Visits.*** Items that are readily available and safe outside the hospital setting can be used in harmful or injurious ways. Therefore, for the safety of all patients, the Hospital asks all visitors to limit what they bring to patient visits. Visitors will be encouraged to secure most items in locked vehicles.

Backpacks, briefcases, purses, cameras, including cell phones with cameras, and similar items may not be brought to visits. MSH will provide a secure locker for these items for the duration of the visit. Attorneys, spiritual counselors, private physicians, staff and authorized agents of the Board of Visitors or of a designated protection and advocacy system and other professionals may bring with them materials necessary for the purpose of the visit.

All items visitors wish to give to a patient must be cleared from a safety standpoint. Staff will instruct visitors to declare the item or items at the time of visitor registration. If visitors give items to a patient without first declaring the item at registration, the Hospital may discontinue the visit or restrict future visits.

- H. ***Hospital or security staff will not search visitors or their possessions if they are not entering patient residential or treatment areas, but items given to the patient will be checked for contraband or other hazards.*** Any property or money

received by a patient will be recorded and managed as required by MSH Policy AD-03, "Management of Patient's Personal Effects". A patient may be searched before or after a visit.

- I. ***A patient's treating Licensed Independent Practitioner may place limits on scheduling, supervision, or other conditions on patient visits*** due to interference with treatment or concerns for safety of the patient, staff, or the public. Visitation conditions must be documented in the patient's progress notes and in the patient's treatment plan, and reviewed when the patient's treatment plan is reviewed. Staff will attempt to contact any person prohibited from visiting to inform them of the prohibition.

Visitation conditions imposed for treatment, safety and security purposes may not interfere with the right of a patient to receive visits from attorneys, clergy, spiritual counselors, private physicians, staff of the Board of Visitors, staff and authorized agents of a designated protection and advocacy system, or other professional persons. Auditory privacy will be preserved for such visits.

- J. ***Hospital staff will ask any visitors who are intoxicated, abusive, or otherwise disruptive to a patient's treatment or safe operation of the Hospital to leave the grounds immediately.*** Hospital security personnel are available to provide assistance. Staff members involved must fully document any such incident. Removing a visitor in this type of situation requires approval of the Hospital Administrator or designee.
- K. Former patients will not be allowed to visit current patients or staff for 45 days following discharge. Former patient who wish to visit will be asked to submit a written request to the patient's treatment team or the hospital administrator. Exceptions to the 45-day limit can be approved by the responsible licensed independent practitioner.

- VI. REFERENCES:** M.C.A. 53-21-142(3), Rights of Persons Admitted to Facility.
- VII. COLLABORATED WITH:** Director of Nursing, Director of Health Information, DPHHS Office of Legal Affairs.
- VIII. RESCISSIONS:** ADM-08, *Visitors* dated November 16, 2012; ADM-08, *Visitors* dated July 13, 2009, ADM-08, *Visitors* dated August 28, 2006; ADM-08, *Visitors* dated June 4, 2004; ADM-08, *Visitors* dated May 22, 2001; ADM-08, *Visitors* dated February 14, 2000; H.O.P.P ADM-01-96-R, *Visitors*, dated September 1, 1996.
- IX. DISTRIBUTION:** All hospital policy manuals.

- X. ANNUAL REVIEW AND AUTHORIZATION:** This policy is subject to annual review and authorization for use by either the Administrator or the Medical Director with written documentation of the review per ARM § 37-106-330.
- XI. FOLLOW-UP RESPONSIBILITY:** Hospital Administrator.
- XII. ATTACHMENTS:**  
A: Montana State Hospital General Visiting Guidelines.  
B: Patient Visitation Request.

Signature:

John W. Glueckert  
Hospital Administrator

## **Montana State Hospital General Visiting Guidelines**

Visits from families and friends are important for patients at Montana State Hospital. Visits can help promote recovery and support family and social relationships outside of the Hospital setting. To promote a safe and therapeutic environment for all persons, we have established the following guidelines for visiting patients at Montana State Hospital.

1. Visiting hours are 9am to 8pm, seven days per week.
2. Visitors must check in at the front desk in the main hospital building to receive a visitor's badge. Please wear it on the front of your clothing at all times during the visit, and return the badge to the front desk at the end of your visit.
3. Visits may not interfere with patient treatment or scheduled therapeutic activities. Hospital staff may place conditions on visits if a need is indicated for safety or therapeutic reasons, or if requested by the patient.
4. Please inform staff at the front desk if you have gift or food items for the patient. Some patients are on special diets and certain items may not be permitted on the patient's treatment unit.
5. Backpacks, briefcases, purses, cameras, including cell phones with cameras, and similar items may not be brought to visits. You may leave them in a locked vehicle, or MSH will provide a secure locker for these items for the duration of the visit.
6. If visitors wish to meet with licensed independent practitioners (Licensed Independent Practitioner) or other staff, visitors should call and arrange this in advance of the patient visit.
7. If children are accompanying the visitor, they may not be left unattended and must be supervised at all times by an adult.
8. Remember, when you go on any MSH Treatment Unit, you are a guest in the patients' "home".
9. Visitors have a responsibility to give accurate identifying information prior to receiving access to see a patient and to identify in advance the patient or patients you wish to visit, as well as the purpose of your visit. Official employee identification cards will be sufficient identifying information for staff and authorized agents of the Montana Mental Disabilities Board of Visitors or a designated protection and advocacy system. This information will be used as the basis to clear you for your visit onto the Unit and it will also be used to secure the patient's advance permission for your visit.
10. Visitors should be aware that for safety reasons, most areas on the Units are monitored by a video monitoring system. The area you will be given to visit privately with a patient may be on the video monitoring system.
11. Patients have a right to refuse visits. This is not common but it happens. When a patient refuses a visit, staff will explain the circumstances to the visitor. If Unit activities at the

- time of the refusal preclude staff from meeting with visitors, staff will set up a time to follow-up with the visitors.
12. If private space cannot be made available for a visit on the unit or if a patient is involved in therapy at the time of the visit, staff will attempt to identify an alternate space for visiting and /or the next available time for a private visit.
  13. Visitors are asked to respect the privacy and confidentiality of other individuals and not share any personal information or knowledge acquired about other patients while visiting Montana State Hospital.
  14. Visits with pets are discouraged. Pets are only allowed if approved and allowed by the patient's attending Licensed Independent Practitioner at the State Hospital. If approved, visits with pets will only take place in designated areas.
  15. Montana State Hospital is a Tobacco Free Hospital and Campus. Patients are not allowed cigarette lighters, matches, chew, snuff etc. Patients, staff and visitors are not allowed to smoke or chew anywhere in the hospital or anywhere on hospital grounds.
  16. Arrangements to take a patient off grounds must be made in advance with the patient's treating Licensed Independent Practitioner.
  17. Patients are not allowed to ride in or enter personal vehicles during visits. Montana law (§ 53-1-102, MCA) prohibits the removal of patients from state institutions without authorization. A person who permits or assists a patient in leaving MSH without authorization may be prosecuted.
  18. Montana law (§ 53-1-103, MCA) prohibits distribution of alcoholic beverages or drugs to patients at state institutions. Individuals who do so may be prosecuted.

Please ask any staff member for assistance if needed. If something does not look right or you have a concern, please let a staff member know. Our goal is to provide each patient with the best possible care and treatment. Visitor's observations and feedback are important to us.

More information about the Hospital and Montana's public mental health system can be found on Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services website at [www.dphhs.mt.gov](http://www.dphhs.mt.gov).

### **Additional Forensic Unit Visiting Guidelines**

1. Check in at the Front Desk of the main Hospital to secure a visitor's badge. This check-in process will be used as the time to communicate to the Unit prior to your visit on our most secure Unit. The Unit will be contacted and the patient will be asked if they accept the proposed visit.
2. Treatment levels on the Unit govern the possible visit locations.
  - a. Patients on level one or level two are allowed non-contact visits;
  - b. Patients on levels three through eight may have contact visits.
  - c. Patients on levels nine and ten may be allowed contact visits on campus.
3. The Treatment Team on the Unit will determine visit locations.
4. If the visit location is on the Unit, for safety reasons you will be asked to pass through the Unit metal detector prior to your visit.
5. Visitors will be allowed auditory privacy for your visit but, for safety reasons, your visit may be observed directly or by way of the video system.
6. Inappropriate behavior, such as, aggression, smoking or chewing, sexual contact, alcohol or drug use, or any threatening or aggressive behavior will result in termination of the visit.
7. The treatment team reserves the right to deny or terminate a visit for safety or treatment reasons.

