Being an informal patient

What are my rights and what can I expect?
What does being an informal patient mean?
Being an informal patient means either that you have come into hospital voluntarily and you have not been kept in hospital under the powers of the Mental Health Act
Or
the section you were under has been stopped by your doctor or has run out.
This leaflet tells you about your rights as an informal, or voluntarily treated, patient and about what we expect from you.

Why am in hospital?
You are in hospital on the advice of your doctor or people who look after you in the community. You have the same rights as any patient in an ordinary hospital.

What are my rights?
While you are in hospital we have a duty of care towards you. This means that your wellbeing is central to our work and that all treatment we give must be beneficial to you. You cannot be legally held in hospital against your will without good reason. Your right not to be held against your will without good reason is protected under the Human Rights Act (1998) and by what is known as common law.

The ward is usually locked to help keep patients, visitors and staff safe and because other patients are being kept in hospital under the Mental Health Act and are not free to leave. You are free to leave at anytime: if you want to leave please talk to the ward staff. They are responsible for your care so will need to know how long you will be away for and when you expect to return.
While in hospital a care plan will be put together, when you and the team plan the best way to look after you. In the care plan it may suggest that you stay on the ward at particular times of the day or that it would be helpful if a staff member goes out with you. If, for example, you wanted to go for a walk late at night the staff might discourage you from doing that.

Under Section 5 of the Mental Health Act doctors and nurses can stop you from leaving if they are worried that you may harm yourself or others. If we need to use Section 5 powers we will give you information about your rights and about what will happen to make sure you get the treatment you need.

**Treatment** is likely to be taking medication, talking, answering questions and perhaps getting involved in group work with other patients. You can refuse any of this treatment and care we suggest for you although, if you do, we hope that you feel you can tell us why.

The right to **contact with your friends** is also protected by the Human Rights Act. The hospital cannot stop you sending or receiving letters, visits or phone calls. It would be helpful if you could let us know in advance if children will be visiting so we can arrange a suitable room for you.

As promised in the NHS Constitution (2010), we will offer you easy-to-understand, reliable and relevant **information** about our services and your treatment and care, to help you take part in decisions about your healthcare and to support you in making these choices.
What do you expect from me?
We aim to make hospital a safe and helpful place to be and we ask that patients respect each other and the staff. We will talk to you about behaviour and arrangements for mobile phones, properly and smoking, etc. We encourage you to get involved in your treatment alongside the clinical team, especially your named nurse. You and the staff will, together, write your care plan to make sure that all aspects of your health and wellbeing are thought about and included.

We encourage you to take part in the planned activities and talk to us if you are worried about anything in your treatment and care plan.

Sharing information and confidentiality
We keep information about you in your medical records so that we can give safe and effective care. We have a legal duty to keep your information confidential, although we may need to share some information with other healthcare providers to give you the best possible care. We will not give other organisations (eg housing departments, education services) information about you with your consent, except if there is a legal reason to do so, for example, if a child is at risk. Please talk to us if you are worried about this.
Leaving hospital
Your leaving hospital completely is usually planned between you, the hospital clinical team and community services. We will send a summary of the discharge plan to your GP and we may need to let your family and carers know so they are aware of extra support you may need. If we prescribe medication for you we will give you a supply before you leave.

If you want to be discharged, but the care team may feel you should stay in hospital, you can still leave. In this situation we will ask you to sign a Discharge Against Medical Advice form, although you can refuse to sign.

If there is anything you don't understand please ask us to explain. If you need help to write a letter please ask one of the clinical team, a relative or friend.
Options available

If you’d like a large print, audio, Braille or a translated version of this leaflet then please ask us.

Useful contact details

SLaM Switchboard: 020 3228 6000
SLaM 24hr Information Line - Advice on how to access SLaM Services: 0800 731 2864
Contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) for help, advice and information:

T: 0800 731 2864
W: www.pals.slam.nhs.uk
E: pals@slam.nhs.uk

Complaints

If you are not happy about something but not sure if you want to make a formal complaint you can speak to a member of staff directly. Alternatively you can contact the PALS Office on freephone 0800 731 2864. If you decide you want to make a formal complaint this can be done by contacting the Complaints Department:

Complaints Department, Maudsley Hospital, Denmark Hill, London SE5 8AZ

T: (020) 3228 2444/2499
E: complaints@slam.nhs.uk
W: www.slam.nhs.uk

www.tfl.gov.uk/journeyplanner

For the quickest way to plan your journey anywhere in greater London use journey planner:

020 7222 1234 (24hrs)