



**South London
and Maudsley**
NHS Foundation Trust

Being a voluntary patient

Information for patients

Summary

- As a voluntary patient, you have the same rights as a patient in any hospital.
- Voluntary patients are also known as “informal” patients.
- We have a legal duty of care to keep you and others safe, so there are procedures about leaving and returning to the ward.
- We do our best to be flexible with voluntary patients at the same time as providing the best possible care and treatment.
- Please tell us if you have any concerns or suggestions.

What is a voluntary patient?

Voluntary patients have consented to treatment for mental health difficulties. They are not in hospital under a section of the Mental Health Act.

Many voluntary patients have been in hospital under section and decided they want to stay in hospital until they feel well enough to leave.

Assessment

This is the first thing that happens if you arrive on the ward as a voluntary patient.

Carrying out an assessment means we get to know you and work out your care plan.

Leaving the ward

The ward doors are kept locked for safety reasons, and because we have a duty of care to all our patients.

During assessment, you are expected to stay on the ward most of the time so we can work out together what kind of care and treatment is right for you.

Even as a voluntary patient, normally before you leave the ward for the first time a nurse and a doctor will need to see you so they can assess whether you are well enough.

We may need to ask you for your patience while we wait for a doctor to be available, and again while we open the door.

Day to day, nurses will still need to check with you that you are well enough to go out before you leave the ward.

If at any time we are very concerned about your mental health, we might use a short-term section of the Mental Health Act to keep you on the ward for a few hours for a proper assessment.

If appropriate, we might decide to keep you in hospital under a longer section so you can get support and avoid harming yourself or others.

Speak to your nurse if you have any questions about leaving the ward.

Care plan

Each patient has a personalised care plan which is discussed and agreed during assessment.

A care plan might include medication, talking, answering questions, group work with other patients, and treatment for physical health problems.

As a voluntary patient, you can refuse any of the care and treatment we suggest, however it helps us if you can tell us about your concerns.

If you want to stop your treatment and leave the ward, we might encourage you to continue with your care plan and remain on the ward.

If we have concerns, we might assess you under the Mental Health Act. This means you might be kept in hospital. If this happens you will be given information about what is happening and your rights.

You can find out more about the Mental Health Act by visiting our website **www.slam.nhs.uk/mha**

Searches

We want this ward to be a safe and therapeutic environment.

This means staff might search you or your property if they have a reason to think you have anything that might harm yourself or others (“restricted items”).

Sometimes, searches will be carried out by a drugs dog, or “sniffer dog”.

If you are searched, we will tell you why, and do our best to respect your privacy and dignity.

If you have any concerns or questions, please speak to a member of staff.

Concerns, questions and complaints

Please tell a member of staff if you have concerns. We want everyone to get the right care and support.

You can also contact the trust **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**. They help to resolve issues before they become serious, and can pass on formal complaints. Call them on **0800 731 2864** (Option 2) or email **pals@slam.nhs.uk**.

For more information, ask a member of staff, see the ward welcome pack and noticeboards, or visit **www.slam.nhs.uk/complaints**

Your notes

Consultant in charge of your care:

Ward doctor:

Primary nurse:

Other notes:

Your notes (continued)

More information and advice

Ask a member of staff, or check these sources:

NHS website

www.nhs.uk

Includes information about both physical and mental health and wellbeing.

MIND

www.mind.org.uk

Leading mental health charity

Advice and information: **0300 123 3393** (local rate)

9am to 6pm, Monday to Friday (not bank holidays)

email: info@mind.org.uk

Rethink Mental Illness

www.rethink.org

Leading mental health charity

Advice and information: **0300 5000 927** (local rate)

9.30am to 4pm Monday to Friday (not bank holidays)

**Please ask if you would like
this leaflet in large print or
another format or language.**