



Royal College *of*
Emergency Medicine

Mental Health

Sub-Committee

Mental Health in Emergency Departments

A toolkit for improving care

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The Core Principle of Mental Health in the Emergency Department

A patient presenting to ED with either a physical or mental health need should have access to ED staff that understand and can address their condition, and access to appropriate specialist services, regardless of their postcode, GP, or time of arrival.

Introduction

We owe it to our patients to work to improve care both by our ED staff and to push for better mental health care services in and out of hours. We hope that this toolkit will equip and inspire Emergency Departments and Liaison services to fight for better services as well as improve the quality of our own ED care.

With input from the Mental Health Committee and the Quality in Emergency Care Committee.

With thanks and acknowledgement to Anne Hicks, previous RCEM Mental Health lead and author of the original toolkit.

[RCEM Acute Insight Series: Mental Health Emergency Care](#)



Kate Swires-Hennessy



Catherine Hayhurst



Mark Buchanan

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Section 1 – RCEM Standards for Mental Health

RCEM mental health audit standards for Individual patients

1. Patients should have mental health triage by ED nurses on arrival to briefly gauge their risk of self-harm, suicide, and risk of leaving the dept before assessment or treatment is complete. This is used to determine what level of observation the patient requires whilst in the ED.
2. Patients at medium or high risk of self-harm or suicide should be searched for objects or medication that may be used to self-harm.
3. Patients at medium or high risk of suicide or of leaving before assessment and treatment are complete should be observed closely whilst in the ED. There should be documented evidence of either continuous observation or intermittent checks (recommended every 15 minutes), whichever is most appropriate.
4. If a patient states that they want to leave or decline treatment, then there should be documentation of the assessment of that patient's capacity to make that particular decision at that time, based on a face-to-face conversation and not rely on records from previous attendances.
5. When an ED doctor reviews a patient presenting with self-harm or a primary mental health problem, they should conduct a brief risk assessment of suicide and further self-harm.
6. Previous psychiatric history should be documented in the patient's ED clinical record. This should include previous self-harm or suicide attempts, previous admissions and current treatment.
7. A Mental State Examination (MSE) should be recorded in the patient's ED clinical record.
8. From the time of referral, a member of the mental health team should see the patient face-to-face and offer appropriate assistance to both patient and referrer within one hour. Full assessment may be delayed if the patient is not yet fit for assessment.
9. People who have attended the ED for help with self-harm should receive a comprehensive biopsychosocial assessment with appropriate safety or care planning at every attendance, unless a joint ED/Psychiatric written management plan states that this is not necessary or unhelpful.
10. Details of any referral or follow-up arrangements should be documented in the patient's ED notes.

RCEM mental health audit standards for the Emergency Department

1. Each department should have a named Mental Health Lead.
2. A policy and process for assessing and observing patients should be in place for those considered to be high risk of self-harm, suicide, or leaving before assessment and treatment are complete.
3. EDs should have a policy and process which clearly states when patients can or cannot be searched. This should be compliant with relevant legislation and have clear processes to safeguard or chaperone patients who are searched and to record the procedure. Searches which are for the clinical safety of the patient should be conducted by clinical staff rather than security guards.
4. An appropriate area of the ED should be available in which patients with mental health problems may be observed. This should be both safe and as calm and quiet as possible.
5. ED and mental health teams should have joint pathways which promote parallel assessment of patients with both physical and mental health needs. Mental health assistance should be delivered at the time that it is requested in line with the recommendations in the NCEPOD Treat as One report and the NICE guidelines sept 2022: Self-harm: assessment, management and preventing recurrence; terms such as “medically fit” or “medical clearance” should not be used to delay this.
6. Departments should follow their trust’s policy for restrictive intervention and should follow guidance for Rapid Tranquilisation (NICE or their own guideline).
7. EDs should have a policy and process for patients under the relevant policing and mental health legislation - including section 297 (Scotland), section 130 (Northern Ireland) or section 136 (England and Wales) to ensure safety, dignity, and timely management.
8. An appropriate room should be available for the assessment and assistance of people with mental health needs within the ED. These should meet the standards of the Psychiatric Liaison Accreditation Network (PLAN).
9. An appropriate programme should be in place for to train ED nurses, health care assistants, and doctors in mental health and mental capacity issues.

Section 2 – Mental Health Triage and Initial Assessment

Any patient presenting with mental illness should undergo mental health triage upon arrival. The purpose of this is to assess the patient's overall presenting state, including their level of agitation, and the risk of the patient leaving the ED before assessment and treatment. This will determine where the patient should be placed in the ED and what level of observation is needed to keep them safe. Mental Health triage is not recommended as a means to determine the risk of future self-harm or suicide. If feasible, mental health triage should include a capacity assessment with regards to decision to leave before being seen by a clinician. It should also promote referral to mental health services from triage to enable joint working.

NICE guidance for self-harm recommends that mental health triage should include:

- the severity of the injury and how urgently physical treatment is needed
- the person's emotional and mental state, and level of distress
- whether there is immediate concern about the person's safety
- whether there are any safeguarding concerns
- the person's willingness to accept medical treatment and mental healthcare
- the appropriate nursing [observation](#) level
- whether the person has a care plan.

Patients at risk of self-harm should be searched (with consent) to check for objects or medications that may be used for further self-harm. Searches which are for the clinical safety of the patient should be conducted by clinical staff rather than security guards. In addition, the initial assessment is a suitable time for information to be delivered as well as gathered by nursing/triage staff.

Feeling on the Edge is a leaflet currently produced by the Royal College of Psychiatrists (RCPsych), with approval of multiple colleges, including our own, to give to self-harm patients at triage.

It explains the process and gives information about services. This leaflet is likely to reduce the proportion of "did not wait" patients and is highly rated by staff and patients.

Some departments stream patients away from the ED to mental health services away from the ED. In these cases, training and triage are vital, as is robust governance. NICE recommends that all patients who have self-harmed should under a psycho-social assessment. Safe ways of getting the patient to the mental health services are needed.

Links

- [NICE: Self-harm: assessment, management and preventing recurrence \(Sept 2022\)](#)
- [RCEM Mental Health \(Self-Harm\) Quality Improvement Project \(QIP\) V2 Information pack](#)
- [Example of adult mental health triage](#)
- [Australian Mental Health Triage Tool](#)
- [MH Physical Assessment and Safe Discharge Tool](#)
- Example of VISA Assessment [form](#), [guide](#), and [observation record](#)

- [APEX Acute Psychiatric Emergencies course \(ALSG\) AEIO system](#)
 - **A** How agitated is the patient?
 - **E** Is the environment safe?
 - **I** What is the patient's current intent – for self-harm or absconding?
 - **O** Does the patient have any objects on them that they may harm themselves with?
- Example of [property search policy](#)
- [RCEM absconding patient guideline](#)
- [Example of a 1:1 policy](#)
- [First response leaflet](#)
- [Feeling on the Edge leaflet](#)

Proforma

Trying to meet national standards of documentation is a real challenge without a proforma. Mental health clerking detail is commonly poor in ED notes, and without a prompt it is unlikely that doctors will record the key findings that inform risk.

The NCEPOD report *Treat as One* has specified certain elements of a clerking which should be included in an emergency assessment of any mental health patient. They have also suggested that details of any patient's mental health should be recorded, even if the patient is not presenting with a mental health related issue.

Various departments may already have their own mental health proforma, but in the light of NCEPOD's recommendations, it may be necessary to adapt a mainstream clerking proforma to include mental health details, as well as to have a specific mental health cascard. Some examples are collated here.

- [Example of a MH cascard](#)
- [Example of Mental Health Risk Pathway](#)
- [Example – 4 areas approach to assessing AED patients following self-harm](#)
- [Deliberate self-harm proforma](#)

Learning Disability

RCEM supports the use of fast-track access and triage for patients with Learning Disabilities (LD) and suitable environments for them to wait in. The use of Hospital Passports and "This is Me" documents should be supported by departments and Trusts, where possible. Access to a LD nurse specialist is desirable to improve the experience for patients with LD attending an ED.

- [This is Me patient form](#)

Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity such as autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) are not mental illnesses but it may be useful to consider these conditions here. It is hard to generalise about what may benefit patients as each person will have individual needs, but there are common issues which ED staff should try to accommodate. The ED is a busy and stressful environment which can be overstimulating or overwhelming. Communication may be harder in this environment, especially if the person is worried or in pain. It is helpful if strategies to help can be started at triage. Some patients will have care plans or passports to outline what helps them.

- Ask patients and carers what would make their attendance easier for them
- Allow patients to wait in less busy areas or outside or in their car with a phone number to contact them on.
- Offer pain relief early, explain who they can ask if they need more.
- Keep communication straight forward, be realistic, update people on waiting times and what will happen next. For example – “the person in the red scrubs will come and take some blood tests.”
- Show people where the toilets are, where they can get a drink, where they can charge their phone. Consider offering a blanket or a hot drink.
- When taking a history, try to allow more time, open questions can be difficult for some to answer. Sometimes patients may need a break.
- Take more care in communication and checking understanding, consider drawing diagrams and writing down advice.

Links

- [Ten top tips on autism-friendly consultations](#)

Section 3 – Staff Education

It is useful to ask if the education, training and clinical knowledge of your staff in mental health matches that for major trauma, cardiac arrest, paediatric, and safeguarding standards.

Nursing staff, including health care assistants, should have access to regular training in mental health so that they are able to assess risk and contribute in a positive way to the patient's care. It is a key element of liaison teams that they should engage in education of ED staff (see PLAN standards).

Including mental health topics within junior doctor teaching programmes (e.g., the management of disturbed behaviour, the MHA and MCA, and other clinically relevant, curriculum-based topics) is also beneficial. Trainees will benefit from spending some of their Educational Development Time with their Liaison Psychiatry service.

The RCEM Mental Health Sub-committee highly values and recommends the APEX (Acute Psychiatric Emergencies) Course. This is an excellent course run by the ALSG, covering the assessment and management of patients with acute mental illness in an emergency setting. Unlike other life support courses, this only requires completion once.

The 2021 curriculum syllabus contains more detail than previously of conditions that ED clinicians should understand. SLO 7. "Deal with complex and challenging situations in the workplace" covers many aspects of crisis mental health care in the ED including mental health and capacity law, dealing with agitation, de-escalation, restraint reduction and rapid tranquilisation.

Junior Induction

Mental health is a high-risk area of our practice, and as such should feature specifically within junior doctor induction. This is particularly important because the provision and style of mental health services vary so dramatically across countries, counties, and cities. Where feasible, it may be a good idea to include some of the psychiatry liaison staff in your induction, as putting faces to names makes for better communication and better patient care. Induction should include referral pathways, use of 1:1 policy, section 136 processes, and reiterate the standard expected for an ED assessment.

- [PLAN standards](#)
- [Example of a teaching session](#) (PowerPoint slides)
- [Example of a MH study day programme/template](#)

Trauma Informed care

There is an increasing recognition that patients who have had experienced difficult circumstances or trauma previously may develop mental health problems. They also may present with physical problems but find aspects of hospital care challenging due to these previous difficulties. NHS Scotland has started a workforce wide training program on trauma, and which includes short accessible videos.

Eating Disorders in the ED

Eating Disorders are particularly poorly understood or taught in Emergency Care. They have the highest mortality rate of any psychiatric disorder. Moreover, patients with eating disorders can present and seem deceptively well – even at the point of ‘near death’. Females are ten times more likely to suffer from an eating disorder than males – though the prevalence in males is increasing. Eating disorders include, but are not limited to, Anorexia Nervosa (restrictive and binge-purge subtypes), Bulimia Nervosa, Eating Disorder Unspecified (ICD-10).

Eating disorders usually involve a lot more than eating behaviours alone and the desire to control one’s weight and appearance. It is important to acknowledge both the physical and psychological distress that these patients present with. Known patients usually present to the ED for complications such as hypokalaemia, bradycardia, hypoglycaemia, syncope, and hypothermia. Occasionally, undiagnosed patients can present to the ED with these complications.

The initial interaction and communication with a patient presenting with an eating problem is very important. Patients with eating disorders are usually frightened, feel like they are a burden on services, or because of their low self-esteem, may feel that they do not deserve the help offered to them.

Eating disorders can be complex and may not always be obviously visible. It may be beneficial to include screening questions around eating behaviours and relationship with food in an initial MH assessment. Additional screening should include other at-risk groups such as young diabetics around insulin compliance.

Initial management of a patient presenting with or a complication of an eating disorder in the ED is to monitor and stabilise them in the department. RCEM supports using the MEED checklist to guide assessment and treatment.

Early input from psychiatry services is fundamental. Most hospitals do not have a dedicated eating disorders service. In an acute hospital, psychiatric liaison services can have a major impact on care of eating disorders patients, especially where there is limited access to specialist services. Joint care with psychiatry services early on in these patients’ presentation to ED can be useful in helping to manage any initial psychological needs and planning for ongoing care. Where patients are very unwell and may not have capacity to decide with regards to treatment for their eating disorder; it is important to have early input from available mental health teams to consider whether or not compulsory treatment would be appropriate.

Curriculum links for EM juniors:

- [Link to Mental Health Syllabus 2021](#)
- [Acute Psychiatric Emergencies course \(APEX\) ALSG](#)

Links

- [PLAN standards](#)
- [Example of a teaching session](#) (PowerPoint slides)
- [Example of a MH study day programme/template](#)
- [MEED Guidelines](#) (checklist on page 182)
- [National trauma training programme](#) – NHS Education for Scotland
- [Transforming Psychological Trauma](#) – NHS Education for Scotland

Section 4 – Suitable environment

There is no question that the middle of an ED, whether busy or quiet, can be a very stressful environment for any patient. However, if a person is feeling paranoid, psychotic, distraught or suicidal, the environment can be clearly detrimental, and can potentially escalate symptoms.

Assessment area

Any assessment area needs to be safe for staff, and conducive to a valid mental health assessment. Standards for these areas are described in PLAN. There should be no ligature points, and nothing that can be used as a weapon. The room should have an alarm system and two doors that open both ways. It is not acceptable to use a room that doubles as an office. This is the requirement that most often prevents a liaison service from achieving full PLAN accreditation, even though it is a core element of providing a therapeutic and safe environment to this patient group. Trusts should have a search policy to enable staff to keep patients (and others) safe.

Example of Search policies

- [Adult](#)
- [Child](#)
- [Body Cam and Search policy](#)
- [RCEM statement into use of body camera's](#)

Observation area

A patient may be observed in a different space to where they undergo assessment by the mental health team. Departments should consider how they can make these spaces as safe, quiet, and calm as possible. A brief risk assessment of the environment should be made whenever a patient at risk of self-harm is put in a cubicle.

Special nursing

Some mentally unwell patients will require continuous 1:1 observation, others need checking on every 15 minutes or so. This can be therapeutic as well as keeping patients safe. The aim is for the nurse to engage with the patient, find out how they are feeling and what might help them – e.g., conversation, quiet, distraction, refreshments etc.

Trusts should have policies in place to determine how observation is achieved, used in conjunction with the ED mental health triage, making sure the nurse observing the patient has a full handover about the person they are to look after. In an ideal situation, this would be provided by Registered Mental Nurses (RMNs) but realistically, is often provided by Healthcare Assistants (HCAs).

Any staff deployed to provide 1:1 observation for a mentally unwell patient should receive basic training in mental health and how to engage and support patients. This could be provided by the Liaison team or by ED staff with expertise in mental health.

Security staff should not be used for 1:1 observation but may often be helpful as support if the patient is violent or aggressive.

Links

- [PLAN guidance](#)
- [Exemplar Psych Assessment Room](#)
- [Example of Job Plan for RMN](#)

Section 5 – Longer stays in the ED

Patients should not be staying for more than a few hours in the Emergency Department, as the system is not set up for longer term care. RCEM has been actively advocating for more beds for adults and children and an overhaul of Mental Health Act assessments as these are the two factors leading to prolonged stays in the Emergency Department. The reality is that patients stay in our departments overnight and longer and good continuing care should be provided, as for every patient.

Minimum care should be – a trolley to sleep on with a blanket, an opportunity for a shower if wanted, food and drink, regular medications prescribed and provided.

Ideally a care plan should be made by ED and mental health professionals, noting legal status of the patient, ongoing need for observation and any risks identified. The patient should be asked what else would help them to be comfortable and calm whilst they wait.

Links

- [Checklist of long-stay MH patients in the ED](#)

Section 6 – Liaison Psychiatry Service

There is plenty of evidence that a liaison service is of huge benefit to patients, staff, and the acute trust. Services developed just for an ED are often too small, unsustainable, and staff risk becoming burnt out. If the service is commissioned for the whole acute trust, then all patients benefit, staff are more resilient, and the response to mental health within the trust becomes timely and consistent.

Any service based outside an acute trust usually struggles to provide a timely response and tends to have responsibilities elsewhere. Liaison psychiatrists are specifically trained to deal with patients in this field and can benefit the patients and hospital Trust more than a general trained psychiatrist. It is not appropriate to cover an acute trust service without a liaison consultant psychiatrist to lead the service. As well as assessing patients presenting acutely with mental health illness, the service should be able to provide advice and support to patients with concurrent physical and mental health problems and patients with medically unexplained symptoms (MUS) where appropriate.

In 2020 the RCEM, RCPsych, RCP and RCN produced a document “Side by Side” detailing how liaison services should work together with physical health staff to provide parallel assessments for patients in EDs presenting with mental illness. The term “medically fit” should not be routinely used, rather patients can be described as “fit for assessment”, or “fit for discharge.” This has been supported by recent [NICE Guidelines](#).

Several national bodies have recommended a standard of an hour from referral to being seen by Mental Health Professionals for a patient with a mental health crisis. One hour is a pilot standard for the Clinical review of standards in NHS England.

The composition of a liaison team has most recently been detailed in the *Achieving Better Access* guides, based on the original recommendations by the Centre for Mental Health. The current advice in England is that hospitals that have 24/7 acute services should have 24/7 liaison psychiatry, either a core or comprehensive model. Ideally, the service should provide an ageless response, i.e. it has the capacity to deal with patients of all ages. When dealing with older adults, the mental health clinicians are more likely to follow patients through onto the wards and therefore work with Medicine for the Elderly and the whole multidisciplinary team. There is great potential to improve lengths of stay by working with these patients jointly.

The table below describes the differences between a Core and an Enhanced provision. By 20/21 it is hoped that all acute trusts will have “all age” mental health liaison cover and that 50% will be “Core 24”. By 23/24 it is planned that 70% be “Core 24”.

Summary of models

Table 6: High level summary of differences between models

	Core	Core 24	Enhanced 24	Comprehensive
Example Number of Beds	c 500	c 500	c 500	c 2000
Consultants	2	2	4	5
Other Medical	0.6	2	2	2
Nurses	2 Band 7 6 Band 6	6 Band 7 7 Band 6	3 Band 7 7 Band 6	2 Band 8b 17 Band 6 10 Band 5
Other Therapists	0	4	2	16
Team Manager Band 7	1	1	1	3
Clinical Service manager Band 8	0.2	0.2 - 0.4	0.2 - 0.4	1
Admin Band 2, 3 and 4	2.6	2	2	12
Business support (band 5)	0	1	1	1
Total Whole Time Equivalent	14.4	25.2 - 25.4	22.2 – 24.4	69
Hours of Service	9-5	24/7	24/7	24/7
Age	16+	16+	16+	16+
Older Person	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Drug and Alcohol	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Out Patient	No	No	Yes	Yes
Specialities	No	No	No	Yes
Approx Costs	£0.7M	£1.1M	£1.4M	£4.5M

Links

- [NHS England Achieving Better Access to 24/7 urgent and emergency care – Liaison Psychiatry guide](#)
- [NHS England Achieving Better access to 24/7 Urgent and Emergency Mental Health Care – Liaison Psychiatry appendices and helpful resources](#)
- [Centre for Mental Health](#)
- [Commissioning guide for acute hospitals for services for patients with Medically Unexplained Symptoms](#)
- [Psychiatric Liaison Accreditation Network \(PLAN\) guidance](#)
- [NCEPOD report Mental Health in Acute Hospitals: Treat as One](#)
- [Side by Side \(RCPsych\)](#)
- [NICE: Self-harm: assessment, management and preventing recurrence \(Sept 2022\)](#)
- [RCEM Mental Health \(Self-Harm\) Quality Improvement Project \(QIP\) V2 Information pack](#)

Section 7 – Services for Children and Young People

Mental health provision for children and young people remains the most under-resourced of all mental health services, whilst attendances in children and young people continue to rise.

RCEM standards apply to children and young people as much as to adults. The process of triage, assessment and special nursing should be modified as appropriate for the situation. Any child or young person presenting to an ED with mental illness should have a safeguarding referral made by the ED staff.

Mental health provisions for children and young people should almost certainly be on the risk register in most trusts. For some, the risks are around the inability of services to assess in a timely manner. For many, the long waits to find a CAMHS bed impact on the care of patients and add pressure on the organisation as a whole.

A useful service model is where the liaison psychiatry team are trained to work with older teenagers and have good support from CAMHS teams.

The practice of admitting all young people for an assessment the next day is not evidence-based and, in some cases, can be unhelpful for the patient. RCEM recommends that a risk assessment should be completed by a mental health clinician with some CAMHS training to determine whether the patient is high risk and needs to stay in or whether they can go home and be seen the next day by CAMHS for a full assessment.

Links

- [Example of child mental health triage](#)
- [Example of a CAMHS risk assessment matrix](#)
- [Referral from triage pathway Manchester](#)
- [Mental Health Pathway for Children](#)
- [RCEM CAMHS Survey Report 2018](#)
- [RCEM CAMHS Survey Report - revisited](#)
- [CYP MH needs, Autism or Learning Disability Programme](#)
- <https://wecantalk.online/>

Section 8 – Mental Health in Older Adults

Older patients are more likely to stay in hospital and be assessed by medical and nursing teams, for example using the comprehensive geriatric assessment, one element of which is a psychological assessment. If, however, ED staff are assessing patients to see if they can be discharged, they should be considering screening for depression in some cases. Depression is very common in older patients admitted to hospital (29%) particularly those with chronic conditions. This impairs people's ability to cope with long term conditions, leads to worse outcomes and more frequent hospital attendance.

Diagnosis and referral for treatment of depression could therefore reduce repeat attendances. The short 4-item Geriatric Depression scale has good sensitivity and specificity may be useful.

Self-harm and suicide attempts are less common in older people, but the risks are much higher. Around 15% of older people with a first episode of self-harm will go on to self-harm again and the risk of suicide is reported to be 49 times higher than in the general population.¹

Assessment post self-harm is usually better carried out by specialist Liaison clinicians as there is interaction with frailty, dementia, social circumstances, medication and physical disease which require more expertise. This may require admission.

Older people presenting with altered behaviour due to delusions, delirium or rarely, late onset psychosis are complex. They require an initial comprehensive medical work up and good joint working with mental health teams to help with diagnosis and management.

Agitation in older people should be managed carefully with a careful search for causes (often multifactorial), de-escalation, a quiet environment where possible. Care should be taken using sedative medication. Options are benzodiazepines or antipsychotics. Avoid haloperidol in older people.

Drug and alcohol disorders are also increasingly common in the older generations. In 2016-7 people over 65 accounted for 30% of those patients admitted for alcohol problems. In ED we should screen for alcohol use in this population. Usual alcohol screening tools (e.g. FAST) are not as sensitive as those designed for this population such as the short Michigan alcohol screening tool.

Links

- [The Silver Book on managing challenging behaviour, depression and self-harm and substance abuse](#)
- [4-item Geriatric Depression Score](#)

¹ Hawton K, Harriss L. Deliberate self-harm in people aged 60 years and over: characteristics and outcome of a 20-year cohort. *International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry* 2006;21(6):572-81.

- [Short Michigan alcohol screening tool](#)
- RCPsych reports of older people's mental health:
 - <https://www.bgs.org.uk/sites/default/files/content/resources/files/2018-05-18/WhoCaresWins.pdf>
 - https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/docs/default-source/improving-care/better-mh-policy/college-reports/college-report-cr221.pdf?sfvrsn=bef8f65d_2

Section 9 – Management of agitation, Restraint Reduction and Rapid Tranquilisation

Patients with mental health problems who are actively trying to leave may need to be kept in the ED, initially by staff listening and talking to them to try to de-escalate and persuade them to stay. An assessment of the patient's capacity to decide to leave should be made by a senior decision maker.

If a patient is assessed as lacking capacity or is already being kept in the ED under another legal framework, e.g. the Mental Health Act, and de-escalation has failed, then the patient may need to be restrained as a last resort to prevent risk to life. Restraint should be proportionate to the risk presented by the patient and should be carried out by staff who are trained. It is RCEM's view that clinical staff should not be the main providers of restraint and that hospitals should have security services who are trauma informed and have training in mental health, de-escalation, conflict resolution and safe restraint. There is evidence that a team with clinical leadership is effective in reducing restraint.² It has also been reported by one trust that improvement in their ED environment for patients with mental health problems and provision of mental health nurses reduced agitation, rates of absconding, restraint and RT.

If a patient is needing to be restrained for more than 10 minutes, and de-escalation has failed, NICE guidance states that Rapid Tranquilisation should be considered. Patients with severe agitation (often due in part to intoxication) should be considered as possible Acute Behavioural Disturbance. Clinicians should be aware of the risks of cardiovascular collapse and the need to use different strategies for Rapid Tranquilisation.

Hospital trusts should have a policy on restrictive and physical intervention. All episodes of restraint (physical intervention) in EDs should be monitored by both the trust's security lead and by an ED clinician. The aim should be to monitor incidence of use of restraint, identify areas for learning and to reduce restraint in the longer term.

Acute Behavioural Disturbance in the ED

The RCEM ABD guideline is for a specific group of agitated patients usually with abnormal psychology. This tends to be stimulant driven rather than mental health crisis. In most situations regarding patients who are agitated because of mental health crisis de-escalation should be attempted. Often increases in distress can be pre-empted and acted on early. The RCEM MH Committee acknowledges the concerns of the RCPsych.

Links

- [RCEM absconding guideline](#)
- [RCEM MCA guideline](#)

² Design and Implementation of an Agitation Code Response Team in the Emergency Department. Wong et al. 2021 [https://www.annemergmed.com/article/S0196-0644\(21\)01381-0/pdf](https://www.annemergmed.com/article/S0196-0644(21)01381-0/pdf)

- [RCEM acute behavioural disturbance guideline](#) (2022)
- [Psychiatric Emergency Team Report Form](#)
- [NICE guideline on short term management of violence and aggression](#)
- [Example of ED Rapid Tranquilisation guideline](#)
- [The Broset Violence Checklist](#)
- [Restraint Reduction Network](#) – produce standards for training within MH trusts and more recently acute hospitals.
- [Approach to Agitation](#) (King's, March 2021)

Section 10 – Multidisciplinary services

Mental health patients in the acute trust have a high rate of co-morbidities with alcohol, substance misuse and other vulnerabilities. Close links with safeguarding also promote good holistic care.

Therefore, to provide a patient-centred service there must be a multidisciplinary team that can deliver joint assessments in a timely fashion. This also provides an environment within the team that offers peer support and supervision. All practitioners working in this field are, by definition, working with a high-risk population, and so the provision of a large team with which to share practice/concerns and learning promotes a sustainable working environment.

In the case of comorbid alcohol or substance misuse, referral for assessment by an Alcohol Specialist Nurse is also likely to be necessary and beneficial. The RCEM Alcohol Toolkit provides further information and guidance about this area.

Links

- [Example – adult liaison team poster](#)
- [Salford alcohol assertive outreach service](#)
- [RCEM alcohol toolkit 2015](#)

Section 11 – Governance – Risk registers, incident forms, 4-hour & 12-hour breaches, and complaints

Identifying and recording risks associated with mental health care within your organisation can be a real driver for resource and change. Mental health services are frequently structured around geographical boundaries; the acute trust should be the focus for all these reports, otherwise the true picture is lost.

Many of the longest waiting ED patients have mental health problems. Due to the nature of the admission process, often the fact that they remain in ED for over 24 hours can be lost and they do not appear within the 12-hour bed request breach figures. A method for ensuring they are counted should be made possible in each organisation to allow correct data interpretation.

A good model is to have a joint governance meeting with your mental health provider with input from liaison and other services within the trust – inpatient, crisis team, duty medical team etc. Incidents, SIs, complaints, risks, and breaches can be reviewed regularly. In addition, give thought to including mental health cases in your ED Mortality & Morbidity governance structure. This will allow a forum to discuss significant cases and learn from current practice.

Investigation of serious incidents should have oversight from both acute hospital and mental health trusts as incidents often involve both organisations. If a patient or relative receives two separate responses to a complaint or incident this underlines the gaps in service provision, whereas a joint response is more likely to promote better working. If joint governance is impossible within a trust, then an alternative process should be arranged whereby cases can be reviewed by both the acute trust and the mental health trust.

ECIST have developed an audit of Mental Health patients which can help get evidence for gaps in service and help with 4 and 12 hour breach analysis. ECIST can also help with analysis of results.

Links

- [SNAP survey into ED waits for mental health beds](#)
- [Example of risk analysis](#)
- [Generic agenda for a MH Governance meeting](#)
- [RCEM Safer Care Toolkit](#)
- [ECIST audit tool](#)

Section 12 – Strategic presence in the acute trust

There will never be a time when liaison psychiatry is a priority for funding within a Community Mental Health Trust (CMHT). Therefore, the acute trust must push consistently for an appropriate and effective liaison service. There needs to be a liaison strategic hub within the acute trust for the following reasons:

- a) Trust risk register: identify the risk to patients with unmet liaison needs
- b) Compliance with national guidelines (this should be evidenced)
- c) Most benefits are trust-wide, or realised across the wider healthcare community, e.g., patients with medically unexplained symptoms
- d) Identification of acute trust service provision needs and gaps in service
- e) Enable disparate commissioning groups to agree to joint working or shared resourcing
- f) Transparent communication links with community services
- g) The bigger issues raised from mental health governance processes looking at incidents and complaints should be escalated to the acute trust executive body

Links

- [Example of MH risk register](#)

Section 13 – High Impact Users (HIUs) and Care Plan Management

There are several patient groups with a mixture of mental health, substance misuse, and chronic medical problems that benefit from a consistent response. To help HIUs in the ED, the development of an agreed care plan may alter behaviours and contribute more constructively to the patient's needs. For example, some patients who are well known to services may benefit from a low-key response from the ED, without formal review by liaison staff, but a timely alert to their community team. In other cases, strategies to avoid admission or over-investigation may benefit the patient.

These care plans need to be actively managed and archived. They should be composed using all appropriate clinicians from the acute trust, mental health, primary care and community services, which may include police and ambulance services. They should include input from the patient as much as possible.

This is an important element of a liaison service in England, since the introduction of the mental health CQUIN in 2017 which requires EDs to reduce the number of attendances for a chosen group of mental health patients by 20% within the year.

ED staff and liaison staff should attend High Intensity User group meetings held by ambulance services and police, in order to work collaboratively.

It is useful for individual EDs to nominate a named consultant to co-ordinate and manage these plans.

Links

- [RCEM Frequent Attenders Guideline](#)
- [RCEM Frequent Attenders position statement](#)
- [Bristol High Intensity Users toolkit](#)
- [Oxford frequent attender program](#)

Section 14 – Evaluation and Service User Involvement

ED and mental health services can be monitored and evaluated through various means. It is recommended that key performance indicators, such as time from arrival to referral to psychiatry, time from referral to assessment and percentage of patients admitted, are monitored.

Throughout mental health, service users have informed the development and delivery of services. This has been useful for both commissioners and providers, and it is highly recommended that service users provide input to commissioning and healthcare staff. This can be in the form of an occasional focus group, structured interviews or asking for written feedback. Allowing a service user to talk directly to staff about their experience of being in the ED can be a very powerful tool for change in attitudes and care giving.

Links

- [Example of KPI for Liaison Service](#)

Section 15 – Strong links with ED, Liaison and Community Mental Health Teams

There should be regular meetings between the acute trust/ED and your main provider of liaison psychiatry, so that you can increase links and understand each other. Involvement in each other's induction programme really helps to improve response times and flow of service. For the pure psychiatry trainees or staff grades, they may have no knowledge of the ED's clinical standards or time requirements. Equally, we need to understand the competing pressures that exist in mental health.

Forming links between the ED and other services can also be helpful such as the crisis team, 136 suite, personality disorder services, CAMHS and services for the homeless.

Ensure that there is Emergency Medicine representation on the local crisis care concordat. This is usually run by the commissioners involving: police, ambulance, psychiatry, CAMHS, Social care (AMHPS), and should have a mix of clinicians and Managers. It is an excellent way to be heard and try and work collaboratively to improve care for patients in crisis.

Transfer policy

Inevitably, there is a regular flow of patients to and from the acute trust and mental health inpatient unit. It is helpful to meet and produce a shared policy to guide this process to ensure that clear lines of communication and responsibility are established. This includes some basic logistics but should focus on the sharing of appropriate information and handover of care.

Whilst some of this is centred around MHA legislative requirements, there are also guidelines to ensure good transfer of clinical data.

Links

- [Example Transfer Policy](#)

Section 16 – Mental Health Act Policy & Section 136 patients

All areas in England will have a multi-agency policy for S136 patients. There should be an appendix relating to the use of Emergency Departments. It is prudent to ensure that this is appropriate for your local service, and that the ED is only used for S136 patients who have an acute healthcare need. Otherwise, it should be expected that mental health services should provide an assessment suite, or alternative space within the mental health unit, where a S136 patient can be appropriately assessed. RCEM agrees that police custody is not a suitable alternative when a S136 suite is unavailable.

The policy should also include a strategy to ensure that acceptable time frames for a mental health act (MHA) assessment are established, with provision for police to remain with the patient if they are managed in the ED.

Where police bring patients to the ED, not using a mental health legislative framework, there should be systems in place for good handover.

The Mental Health Act is currently being amended. We will update members when this has been finalised.

Links

- [RCEM Section 136 guideline](#)
- [S136 update from the Policing and Crime Act 2017](#)
- [London's Section 136 pathway - Peer review of mental health crisis pathways for children & young people](#)
- [Mental health crisis care for Londoners: Section 136 pathway and health based place of safety specification](#)
- [London police handover process \(not 136\)](#)
- [Example S136 Flowchart](#)
- [RCEM Guideline – The Mental Capacity Act in Emergency Medicine – deals with MHA and MCA](#)
- [House of Commons Select Committee **questions** re the Mental health Act and implications to the Emergency Department](#)
- [House of Commons Select Committee **Report** into the Mental health Act and implications to the Emergency Department](#)

Section 17 – National Representation and Resources

- NICE - The College has had members sitting on the guideline development groups and expert reference groups where the outputs are relevant to the ED, e.g., self-harm, delirium, and alcohol.
- PLAN - The accreditation committee for this is only quorate with representation from RCEM.
- Close working relationship with the Faculty of Liaison Psychiatry are in place to ensure collaborative working in all areas, but particularly on preventing suicide and the management of self-harm.

Links

- [NICE](#)
- [PLAN](#)
- [Faculty of Liaison Psychiatry](#)

Section 18 – Psychiatric Liaison Accreditation

The RCPsych runs PLAN Liaison services pay to sign up to gain accreditation. The cycle involves the submission of a self-audit, a visit by a peer review team who conduct an external review, and then all the information is considered at an accreditation panel. The process is wide in its remit and may consider all sizes of service. It looks at the personnel within the service, the environment, the education of ED staff, and feedback from patients and carers.

Where a service is accredited by PLAN, this offers assurance and benchmarking, which can provide a defence against future resource constraints. However, if the service does not meet the standard for accreditation the feedback is thorough, and where necessary involves communication at board level to demonstrate deficiencies in services and routes for improvement. This can be a significant driver for resource allocation and change.

The PLAN standards are regularly reviewed, and the accreditation panel consists of representatives from the RCPsych, RCP, RCEM, RCN, MIND and service users.

Links

- [Psychiatric Liaison Accreditation Network \(PLAN\)](#)

Section 19 – Useful documents and Web Resources

National Documents

- [Assessing Mental Health Services in Acute Trusts report \(CQC\)](#)
- [ALSG – APEX course Acute Psychiatric Emergencies](#)
- [Achieving better access to Mental Health Services by 2020](#)
- [Kings Fund – Mental Health and New Models of Care: Lessons from the Vanguards P 30.](#)
- [The 5 Year Forward View for Mental Health](#)
- [Crisis Care Concordat](#)
- [MHA Code of Practice](#)
- [NCEPOD Treat as One full document](#)
- [HSIB Mental Health Investigation](#)
- [Royal College of Psychiatrists](#)
- [RCEM Mental Health \(Self-Harm\) Quality Improvement Project \(QIP\) V2 Information pack](#)
- [Side by Side \(RCPsych\)](#)

General Resources for Staff and Patients

- [MIND](#)
- [Rethink Mental Illness](#)
- [Samaritans](#)
- [Finding Local Help](#)
- [Relate](#)
- [Distress Brief Intervention \(Scotland\)](#)
- [Access to mental health inpatient services in London](#)
- [London Mental Health Compact Diagnostics Report](#)
- [Kooth - Kooth gives online support to YP in crisis](#)
- [Qwell - QWELL gives online help and support to adults in crisis](#)

Suicide Prevention

- [Stay Alive App](#)
- [Papyrus](#)
[Papyrus are a charity that deal with Prevention of Young Suicide. The web site offers support for patients in distress and also links to training and education.](#)
- [StayingSafe.net](#) is a free online resource developed by 4 Mental Health and commissioned by NHS England. It guides people to create a Safety Plan to aid when in distress, considering self-harm or suicide. Includes:

- Explanatory videos
- Videos of people with lived experience discussing benefits of a Safety Plan
- Online Safety Plan with pre-populated suggestions
- Blank Safety Plan to download and print
- Free posters to print/display in waiting areas.
- Consider saving it on their smartphone home page.

It is best practice to ensure that all patients who attend the Emergency Department in Mental Health crisis after self-harm are reviewed by Mental Health services, usually the Liaison Team.

It is, however, in our remit to show compassion, ensure safety and give hope while they are awaiting this review. A useful way of using this time is to show the patient, relatives, and friends.

Eating Disorders

- [MEED Guidelines](#) (checklist on page 182)
- [BEAT a link to information and support for patients with eating disorders](#)
- [TALKED: A national peer-led charity supporting anyone affected by eating disorders or distress](#)

CAMHS Resources

- [RCEM CAMHS Survey report](#)
- [NCEPOD Report – Mental Healthcare in Young People and Young Adults 2019](#)
- [“We can Talk” – face to face training](#)
- [“We can Talk” – online training resource](#)
- [Young Minds](#)

Refugees/Trafficking/Violence

- [VITA Network Advancing the Health Response to Human Trafficking and Exploitation](#)
- [VITA Training](#)
- [Refugee Council](#)
- [RCEM Management of Domestic Violence Guidance](#)

Police and Security Resources

- [RCEM Security and Restraint in the ED](#)
- [Maybo Training](#)
- [Mental Health Cop](#)
- [Respond Training: Multiagency training into the s136 process](#)

Mental Health Act & Mental Capacity Act

England

- [Essex Chamber A Blog about all things capacity](#)
- [Webinar: Suicide and the misuse of capacity](#)
- [Mental Health Act](#)
- [Mental Capacity Act](#)

Scotland

- [Mental Health Act, Legislation, and Guidance](#)
- [Mental Health Capacity Act](#)

Wales

- [Mental Health Act](#)

Northern Ireland

- [Mental Health Act & Capacity](#)

Patient & Information Leaflets

- [Patient Leaflet](#) (Charing Cross Hospital)
- [NHS Veterans Leaflet](#)
- [U Can Cope](#) (RCPsych)
- [Feeling Overwhelmed](#) (RCPsych)

Functional Illness

- [Dissociative Seizures](#)
- [Medically Unexplained Symptoms](#)

Autism

- [Autistica](#)
- [National Autistic Society](#)

Authors

Kate Swires-Hennessy, Catherine Hayhurst, and Mark Buchanan

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Review

Usually within three years or sooner if important information becomes available.

Conflicts of Interest

None

Disclaimers

RCEM recognises that patients, their situations, Emergency Departments and staff all vary. This guideline cannot cover all possible scenarios. The ultimate responsibility for the interpretation and application of this guideline, the use of current information and a patient's overall care and wellbeing resides with the treating clinician.

Research Recommendations

Suicide risk assessment in the ED

Benefits of joint working between ED and Liaison Psychiatry

Reducing restraint in the ED

Key words for search

Mental health, mental health triage, suicide risk assessment, liaison psychiatry, section 136



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