



**Western Health
and Social Care Trust**

**Policy for Use of Mobile Devices / Phones
in Mental Health Wards**

May 2014



Title	Policy for the Use of Mobile Devices / Phones in Mental Health Wards
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Equality & Diversity Statement

The Western Health & Social Care Trust has a positive duty to be proactive and ensure that it provides services and develops policies that are accessible and appropriate to all sections of the community. The development / review of this policy has undergone an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA).

1. Introduction

The Western Health and Social Care Trust recognises that when a patient is in hospital, communication with family and friends is an essential element of support and comfort.

Communication is made easier today with the widespread use of mobile phones and other devices and their integrated functionality.

However, these devices also often provide additional functionality i.e. Information & Communication Technology (ICT) including the capability to access the internet and use camera and video recording functions and music players.

All new policies relating to Mental Health facilities refer to DHSSPS guidance regarding Deprivation of Liberty (DOL) and incorporate the principles of “best interest” and “least restrictive intervention” whenever possible. However incorporation of DOL guidance needs to be balanced against the potential risk of harm to vulnerable patients (and visitors) from the inappropriate use of mobile devices, e.g. access to detrimental material and or taking unauthorised photographs or video recordings which could interfere with patient safety, dignity and privacy and compromise patient confidentiality.

In addition, the use of mobile phones can be intrusive and impact adversely on the environment of others. Patients have a right to, and a need for, a peaceful environment, both day and night time, uninterrupted by a number of different ringtones. Also the mobile device/phone chargers can pose a ligature risk.

Therefore it is important that we control/restrict the use of mobile devices/phones/chargers within mental health facilities by taking the following factors into consideration.

- Providing a therapeutic environment
- Promoting Safety & Recovery
- Protecting Confidentiality
- Protecting people from abuse
- Protecting the Human rights of individuals (including DOL)
- Promoting socially acceptable standards of behaviour
- Promoting positive contact with carers, friends & family.

(Throughout this policy the term ‘mobile device’ automatically includes mobile phones, camera phones, laptops and chargers and any device which connects to internet or has capacity to record either sound or pictures).

2. Aim and Scope

This Policy aims to help everyone understand the importance of ensuring that patients remain safe from harm and intrusion, that they are treated with dignity, and enjoy privacy and comfort during their stay in Mental Health wards within the Western Health & Social Care Trust.

This Policy applies to all patients, staff and visitors within all Mental Health inpatient facilities in the Western Health & Social Care Trust.

3. Designated Areas for Use of Mobile Devices/Phone

Patients will be permitted to keep mobile devices/phones (excluding chargers) subject to the satisfactory completion and ongoing review of the risk assessment process by the Multi-disciplinary team including the brief risk screening tool & the comprehensive risk assessment (as per Promoting Quality Care guidance). All staff are subject to ongoing training on risk assessment processes & implementation of risk management plans in order to reduce the risk of harm to self and others. Controls may include the removal of all mobile devices until any identified risks have been reduced or resolved.

Chargers will be removed on admission and stored by Nursing staff for safe keeping due to the potential ligature risks. All mobile devices can be charged as and when requested at a central point. All chargers in use must be Portable Appliance Tested (PAT) checked by the Trust.

The Trust encourages all patients to leave their valuables at home. The Trust will not be liable for Patient valuables or property (in line with Patients Property Procedures guidance March 2012) except where the Mobile device is being stored by Nursing staff in a locked safe as a precaution. In this case the property will be checked & details recorded by two staff in the ward property book and the patient will be given a receipt.

All Patients must agree to restrictions being placed on the use of mobile devices as follows;

- **No use of the recording or photographing facility**
- **No 'ring tone' (silent/vibrate setting)**
- **Avoid lending to others**
- **The trust will accept no liability for damage or loss of mobile phones.**

Mobile devices may be used in:

- Day room
- Bedrooms (except multi-bedded rooms after 10.00pm)
- Dining rooms (except during meal times)

Mobile devices **may not** be used in the following areas:

- **Toilet and bathroom facilities**
- **Day care facilities**
- **Recreation room.**

If a patient is observed using their mobile device in breach of these conditions they will be asked to hand their phone in to the Nursing staff for safe keeping. Clear explanations will be given as to why this policy is necessary within the ward environment. If the patient refuses to comply with the request, then the risks will be assessed and discussed within the ward Multi-disciplinary team. Actions will be agreed and recorded in the patients care plan and discussed with the patient and reviewed regularly. The patient's use of their mobile phone may be closely monitored/supervised if necessary. If however the patient is using their phone for an illegal act or an act that is felt to be detrimental to their mental health it may be necessary to contact the PSNI for support in removing the mobile phone

Visitors are requested not to use mobile phones whilst on in-patient wards and asked to keep them on silent during the visit to avoid disturbing the peace and quiet of the ward environment.

3.1 Additional points

- All mobile device/phone chargers must be submitted to staff on admission.
- Staff may use their own mobile phone in administrative offices and non-patient areas. Staff are not permitted to use a patient's mobile device without the patient's consent.
- Where mobile phones cannot be used by patients, alternative arrangements (supervised or otherwise) are available through use of payphones or landline.
- Mobile device theft is commonplace in society. The Western Health and Social Care Trust cannot take responsibility for loss or damage to privately-owned equipment while on the premises except when the device has been submitted to staff for safe keeping.
- Each ward will have a process in place where mobile phones/devices can be charged at a central point after 10pm.
- All ward areas are responsible for displaying information to patients, visitors and staff about this policy.
- Exceptional circumstances will be accommodated by the Nurse-in-Charge.

4. Staff Mobile Device Policy

The restrictions on mobile devices/ phone usage in designated areas apply to staff as well as to patients and staff should not carry their personal mobile phones when on duty as incoming calls can impact on the quality of clinical or therapeutic interaction between patients and staff. (Comfort and meal breaks should be used for checking messages and/or making calls). Should staff need



to be contacted at work they should ensure that people have their ward contact number.

Staff are not permitted to charge their mobile phones on the premises. All chargers in use must be PAT (Portable Appliance Test) checked by the Trust.

All staff are empowered to challenge the misuse of mobile devices on site.

5. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed in two years' time (May 2016).



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