

VIRGINIA PSYCHIATRIC MEDICAL ASSESSMENT AND SCREENING GUIDELINES

Virginia has a protocol, established in 2018 by the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, that standardizes the Medical Assessment and Screening process for psychiatric admissions from emergency departments. The protocol serves two key purposes:

- **Removes the need for blanket testing on patients experiencing mental health crises, and**
- **Reinforces state law allowing for Doc-to-Doc consultation between the Emergency Physician and Psychiatrist at any private hospital, state hospital, or crisis stabilization unit.**

Doc-to-Doc: It's State Law.

If there are disagreements regarding assessment and screening needed prior to psychiatric admission, an Emergency Physician can request a direct communication with the admitting Psychiatrist. This is allowed by state law and outlined in the Code of Virginia, § 32.1-127.

20. Shall require that each hospital that provides inpatient psychiatric services establish a protocol that requires, for any refusal to admit (i) a medically stable patient referred to its psychiatric unit, direct verbal communication between the on-call physician in the psychiatric unit and the referring physician, if requested by such referring physician, and prohibits on-call physicians or other hospital staff from refusing a request for such direct verbal communication by a referring physician and (ii) a patient for whom there is a question regarding the medical stability or medical appropriateness of admission for inpatient psychiatric services due to a situation involving results of a toxicology screening, the on-call physician in the psychiatric unit to which the patient is sought to be transferred to participate in direct verbal communication, either in person or via telephone, with a clinical toxicologist or other person who is a Certified Specialist in Poison Information employed by a poison control center that is accredited by the American Association of Poison Control Centers to review the results of the toxicology screen and determine whether a medical reason for refusing admission to the psychiatric unit related to the results of the toxicology screen exists, if requested by the referring physician;

Get the Guidelines.

Guidelines are available for both Adults and Children, and were developed over two years by a workgroup with representatives from DBHDS, the Virginia College of Emergency Physicians (VACEP), and the Virginia Hospital & Healthcare Association (VHHA). In addition, feedback was sought from multiple behavioral health stakeholders throughout Virginia, including the Virginia Association of Community Services Boards. The guidelines:



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- Assist with efficiently identifying potential medical etiology and comorbidities requiring treatment
- Encourage and reinforce doctor-to-doctor communication and collaboration through the establishment of procedures for amicably resolving concerns around psychiatric admissions
- Outline the admission limitations of state psychiatric hospitals and crisis stabilization units (CSUs) through a list of exclusionary criteria

A **Protocol Review and Monitoring Committee (PRMC)** is a group of stakeholders who monitor implementation and recommend Guidelines revisions, as well as manage escalations from frontline staff.