

# Patient Safety Advisory

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- Item:** Plastic cards can be used to disable locks in inpatient mental health and Emergency Department (ED) settings treating patients who have the potential for unpredictable or unsafe behavior (e.g., violence, suicide, etc.) and are not on 1:1 observation
- Specific Incident:** A patient on an inpatient mental health unit used his Veterans Crisis Line card to disable a door lock and gain entry to a room where bottles of hand sanitizer were kept. The patient was able to disable the lock by jamming the card into the area where the lock was located and moving the card back and forth until the door unlocked. The patient then took 12 bottles of liquid hand sanitizer back to his room and drank some of the hand sanitizer. The patient became agitated and a crisis code was called. The patient has a history of drinking hand sanitizer as a form of self-directed violent behavior.
- Recommendations:** Facilities shall review and complete the following recommendations or implement other measures to achieve an equivalent or increased level of safety by close of business June 25, 2012.
1. All staff working on inpatient mental health and ED settings treating patients who have the potential for unpredictable or unsafe behavior (e.g., violence, suicide, etc.) and are not on 1:1 observation should be made aware of this Patient Safety Advisory.
  2. These vulnerable units should have a policy in place to restrict patient access to plastic wallet cards (e.g., patient credit cards, driver's licenses, Veterans Crisis Line cards, laminated social security cards, supermarket savings cards) while patients are on the unit. Units should obtain and hold (and also keep safe) the patient's plastic wallet cards during inpatient admission so that these plastic wallet cards cannot be used to disable locks on doors or cabinets, or used for other self-harm. Plastic wallet cards should only be returned to the Veteran upon discharge from the unit.

NOTE: If patients have normally been provided any plastic wallet cards upon admission (e.g., Veteran's Crisis Line card), supply patients instead with a paper version until they are discharged from the unit, upon which time a plastic version may be provided.

3. Staff in these vulnerable units should also check all doors to rooms and cabinets containing toxic chemicals and other contraband items to ensure the locks cannot be disabled by items that may be available to patients. If it is possible to disable a lock(s), consider changing to a more secure lock (e.g., dead-bolt lock, dead-latch lock). If a more secure lock cannot be obtained, other measures to increase the security of toxic chemicals and other contraband items should be put in place (e.g., move a cabinet to a more secure location; install audible alarms on specific doors or cabinets to alarm when opened).
4. The **Patient Safety Manager** shall document on the VHA Hazard Alerts and Recalls Web site that medical center leadership has reviewed and implemented these recommendations or equivalent safety measures, or that these recommendations are not applicable to your facility.

**Additional Information:** The Mental Health Environment of Care Checklist (<http://www.patientsafety.gov/SafetyTopics.html#mheocc>) has recommendations regarding the vulnerability described in this Patient Safety Advisory, specifically Questions 12 and 33 (see the attachment).

**Attachment:** Questions 12 and 33 from the Mental Health Environment of Care Checklist (Version 03-01-2012)

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**ATTACHMENT: Questions 12 and 33 from the Mental Health Environment of Care Checklist (Version 03-01-2012)**

The Mental Health Environment of Care Checklist requires that hand sanitizer be kept away from patients (Question 12) and that all toxic chemicals are secured (Question 33):

Ques. No.	Site / Item	Questions / Criteria	Rationale / Assessment Methods
12	Other items on the wall	12.a. Are bulletin boards, message boards, posters, telephones, door stops, exit signs, and lights secured using tamper resistant screws? ----- 12.b. Are dispensers for alcohol based hand cleaners not accessible to patients?	Look at each item. All items must be secured to the wall in a manner that prevents removal or use as a weapon or for self-harm. It must be flush with the wall or beveled in a manner so that it cannot be used as an anchor for hanging. If lights are on the wall, the glass bulbs should not be easily accessed.  Alcohol based gels and foams may be consumed by patients and therefore should not be accessible to them.
33	Chemicals and equipment	Are chemicals, including those in housekeeping carts, secured when not in use?	All chemicals, housekeeping supplies and equipment, and maintenance carts and equipment must be secured or have someone in attendance.