

Fact Sheet for Students Being Hospitalized

Going to the hospital can be an uneasy time in the best of circumstances. Even if you're "taking it in stride," it's natural to feel anxious, fearful, overwhelmed, and confused.

We've done our best to come up with a clear plan to get you to a facility or a hospital for an assessment and possible admission. Here are some guidelines for what to expect.

Each person's process is different, so consider this a very general handout. Your circumstances may make it difficult to be fully prepared, so do the best you can.

Bring with you (if you can):

- Your driver's license & insurance card (or the company name, policy, and group number)
- Authorization number from your insurance company (if they've already been contacted)
- Names and phone numbers for your emergency contacts (e.g., parents, family, friends)
- 1-2 changes of clothes, small amount of personal hygiene items (or the phone number of someone who will bring those items to you)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ's):

Who refers me to the hospital?

If a professional on campus or in the community believes your symptoms are severe and/or you are a danger to yourself or others, they will want you to agree to go to the hospital "voluntarily." If you don't agree, they may be obligated to take legal steps to have you evaluated for "involuntary" admission.

How long will it take to complete a psychiatric evaluation?

- 5-8 hours (in most cases), from the time you arrive at the facility/ hospital for crisis assessment to actually getting admitted and assigned to a room or released back to the community. It could take longer, however, depending on your situation and the availability of a bed in a crisis stabilization unit.

Here's why it takes so long: (The steps may vary from one hospital to the next)

1. *When you arrive, you will start at the ER or Crisis Intake Area and wait to be seen.*
2. *Once you are taken in, you may be asked to change into a hospital gown and socks. If so, your personal belongings will be collected and kept in a safe place.*
3. *A nurse may have you provide a urine and blood sample to be tested for toxins, etc.*
4. *A member of the hospital staff will check in with you or be monitoring your area to make sure you stay safe*
5. *After a period of time (sometimes hours), a psychiatrist will come and talk to you. *If you are not in a private area at this time, be sure to request one.**

The psychiatrist (or even a counselor working with the doctor) will ask you things very similar to what you may have already been asked:

- How you've been feeling, both physically and mentally, and for how long
- What your history is for mental health and substance abuse treatment, as well as your family history

It is important to answer all questions as honestly as possible.

6. *If psychiatrist decides to admit you to the hospital (either the one you're in or another), you will have to wait for a bed in a room. This can take hours.*

How long will I have to stay?

Voluntary Admission: The time will be determined by you and your health care team at the hospital.

Involuntary Admission: After the initial screening and assessment, the law allows for 72 hours of additional observation and stabilization time.

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Will I be able to have visitors?

Most Acute Care Facilities/ Emergency Rooms have visiting hours in the evenings and weekends. If your friends and family are not able to come during the scheduled visiting hours, sometimes the facility staff will accommodate alternative visiting hours. Be sure to check with the staff.

Do they allow me to make phone calls?

Most Acute Care Facilities/ Emergency Rooms will provide a phone for you to touch base with your emergency contacts. It might be difficult for you to receive incoming phone calls. To facilitate this process, be sure to tell your friends and family which facility you are at and obtain the number where you can be reached from your nurse. Every psychiatric unit has a phone available that you will share with the other patients during the specified hours.

Will my parents find out? Is it confidential otherwise?

If you are over eighteen, your parents won't find out unless you tell them. However, if you are on their health insurance, they might receive information about your claim. At eighteen, you are considered an adult and unless you are undergoing the petition (involuntary) process, you get to make most of your treatment decisions, in conjunction with the people on your treatment team. Your treatment both in the acute care facility is completely confidential and nobody can find out—not your parents, friends, or professors—unless you feel comfortable telling them.

Do I have to take medications?

If you are anxious in the Emergency Room, the physician might offer you some medication to make you more comfortable while you are waiting to see the psychiatrist staff person. Medication can be helpful in a variety of situations, but as long as you are voluntary, you don't have to take anything you don't want to. The nurses who administer medications have received training on how they work, so be sure they can tell you what you are taking, the reason for the medication, and any side effects you should be aware of. They can usually provide you with a printout of the particular medications that have been prescribed, which includes more detailed information.

How much will it cost? What if I don't have the money to pay for it?

The price of your hospitalization will vary based on which facility you are admitted to and your insurance coverage. If you are experiencing a mental health emergency, it is usually not helpful to think about the cost. Hospitals work out payment plans and depending on the hospital, absorb the cost if you can demonstrate your circumstances.

Will I be excused from missing school or work?

You will be excused from missing school or work in the same way that you would be if you were hospitalized for a medical or non-psychiatric illness. When you are discharged from the hospital, the physician can provide you with a note. At some hospitals, you can get this written on the main hospital letterhead instead of something that says "psychiatry" on it.

Upon your request, the SOCAT program staff can arrange to have an email sent to your professors indicating you are in the hospital and that they should maintain you on their class rosters and assist you in making up coursework upon your return. If you have a professor who refuses to accommodate your absence, it might be helpful to check back in with the SOCAT staff.

Will I have to see more counselors?

Things might seem overwhelming when you leave the hospital.

If you are given prescriptions for medications, fill them right away so you don't forget. Make sure that you know if you need to get any labs for your medication levels (e.g. lithium, Depakote, etc.).

If the hospital has scheduled an appointment for you to see an off-campus psychiatrist and/or counselor, be certain that you have the dates and times and know how to get there. These appointments are meant to help you stay well.

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What about classes & school?

The most important thing is that you take care of yourself. While you may want to get right back into classes, homework, and everything else you have to do, it is essential that you put yourself first.

Take some time to rest. Do something relaxing that you enjoy.

Don't push yourself to do anything. There will be time to get everything done. Be patient with yourself and what you're able to do.

Don't force yourself to make any big decisions about anything.

As far as school goes, it's helpful to go slow and steady as you get back to your routine. You might want to e-mail your professors to tell them of your absence and make an appointment to go to office hours to discuss how you will make up the work you have missed. SOCAT Case Management can help with this.

Working with SOCAT Case Management?

The SOCAT program staff will be contacting you by email and/or phone call.

It is important that you get in call and set up an appointment with SOCAT within 3 days of your discharge.

This meeting is required for transition back to classes and is part of USF's Wellness Referral program.

This is your time to discuss any questions or concerns about your health and academic needs.

The SOCAT staff will work with you to make sure you have all the resources you need to support your recovery and success; both on and off campus.

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