Section 9 Subject 9.1 **Policy 9.1.8**	Clinical Policies Admissions, Transfers, and Discharges **Inpatient Absence for Personal or Therapeutic Reasons**	12/01/90 - Originated 11/03/11 - Reviewed w/ changes - Reviewed w/o changes 11/30/11 - Effective Hospital Administration - Author

Inpatient Absence for Personal or Therapeutic Reasons

Definitions

Brief off unit absence: An inpatient leaving the unit for personal reasons an anticipated time of one hour or less

Therapeutic Pass: A longer authorized absence from the unit for up to five (5) hours.

Policy

The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston (UTMB) recognizes the benefits of being outdoors and the positive impact fresh air and sunshine can have on a patient's overall wellbeing.

Accordingly, access to the outdoors should be considered an important part of the plan of care for all patients with long lengths of stay.

UTMB encourages patients to communicate with their healthcare team and requests that each patient notify their nurse before leaving their inpatient unit. Patients needing to leave for longer periods of time (e.g., for a therapeutic experience or to manage personal affairs) may be granted a therapeutic pass by their provider for an absence up to five hours.

Clinicians should encourage patients to remain on or near the UTMB campus, and should remind patients UTMB discourages smoking. UTMB is a smoke free campus, and smoking is not permitted anywhere on the premises.

This policy does not apply to:

- Patients leaving the unit for clinical procedures or testing;
- Patients under forensic study; and
- Offender patients under the custody of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) at Hospital Galveston.

Procedures

Each inpatient unit must establish and maintain an "Off-Unit Log" to document:

1. The name of the patient leaving the unit;

Procedures, continued

2. The date and time the patient left and returned to the unit;
3. The patient's destination outside of the unit;
4. The estimated duration of the patient's absence; and
5. A contact number for the patient, if available.

Before a patient leaves the unit, staff should ensure the patient is capable of ambulating and mentally oriented, or has proper assistance if not.

If the patient is receiving an infusion of a controlled substance, such as through patient controlled analgesia (PCA) or patient controlled epidural analgesia (PCEA), the infusion must be stopped and disconnected prior to leaving the unit.

Patients who have received narcotics should remain on the inpatient unit for at least one hour after administration. Patients who refuse must sign out against medical advice (AMA) before leaving the unit.

Brief off-unit absence (one hour or less)

The following guidelines should be followed for patients requesting a brief off-unit absence:

1. A brief off-unit absence does not require a provider order.
1. Minors require parental consent to leave the inpatient unit, unless accompanied by a clinical staff member wearing the appropriate UTMB badge for pediatric patient transport.
2. Unit staff should ask the patient to estimate the duration of their absence, and record as much information as possible in the Off-Unit Log.
3. Patients shall be encouraged to leave for one-hour or less increments.
4. Patients should also be notified that if they fail to return to the unit as expected they may be discharged as absent without official leave (AWOL) and risk losing their bed.

If the patient fails to return to the unit within thirty minutes of their expected return time, it shall be assumed that the patient has left the unit AWOL (see IHOP Policy 9.1.14 Patient Discharge Planning).

Procedures, continued

Therapeutic Pass (up to five hours)

Patients requesting a longer absence may be granted a therapeutic pass by their provider. A therapeutic pass allows inpatients to be absent from the unit for up to five hours.

Before granting a patient's request for a therapeutic pass, providers should first consider whether hospital discharge may be more appropriate.

The following guidelines must be followed for the issuance of a therapeutic pass:

1. A Patient Absence Request form must be completed and signed by the attending physician (or designee) and the patient (or personal representative).
2. A therapeutic pass may only be issued under a provider order, which must specify (i) the length of time the patient is authorized to be absent from the nursing care unit, (ii) the reason for the absence, and (iii) any special instructions related to the pass.

   Therapeutic passes may not be issued to:

   a. minor patients without parental consent;
   b. patients scheduled for surgery after their preoperative evaluation has been completed.
3. Therapeutic absences should be planned so as to not interfere with medication administration. However, providers may approve and document by provider order late or missed doses of prescribed medications as necessary. No medications may be dispensed from the patient's medication drawer.
4. Nursing staff must assess and document the patient's status both when the patient leaves and returns to the unit.
5. Unit staff should remind the patient his or her bed will be held for the duration of the pass only, and that the patient may be assumed AWOL if he or she does not return when expected.
6. The patient's medical record must remain on the nursing unit,

Procedures, continued

and charting shall be continued upon the patient's return.

If the patient fails to return to the unit at the designated time, the nurse shall notify the provider and the nurse manager (or their respective designees).

Patients who fail to return may be designated AWOL and discharged (see IHOP Policy 9.1.14 Patient Discharge Planning).

References

IHOP 9.1.14, Patient Discharge Policy

UTMB Nursing Practice Standards, Policy 7.2.70, *Patients on Therapeutics Pass*