



Institutional Handbook of Operating Procedures Policy 09.01.08	
Section: Clinical Policies	Responsible Vice President: EVP & CEO UTMB Health System
Subject: Admission, Discharge, and Transfer	Responsible Entity: Nursing Services

I. Title

Inpatient Absence for Personal or Therapeutic Reasons

II. 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, to the extent possible, should be considered an important part of the plan of care for eligible patients with long lengths of stay.

UTMB recognizes that as part of their course of treatment certain patients may require a brief off unit absence during their admission. In order to permit certain patients to be temporarily absent from their unit without being discharged, UTMB has established criteria for such a brief off unit absence. 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 the UTMB campus and should remind patients that UTMB discourages smoking and the use of tobacco products. UTMB is a tobacco free campus, and use of all tobacco products, including electronic cigarettes is not permitted anywhere on the premises.

UTMB respects the diverse cultural needs, preferences, and expectations of the patients and families it serves to the extent reasonably possible while appropriately managing available resources and without compromising the quality of health care delivered.

III. General Guidelines

A. Inpatient Absence Agreement

As part of the admission process, patients sign and are provided a copy of UTMB’s Inpatient Absence Agreement ([English](#) or [Spanish](#)). The Agreement outlines the guidelines and expectations for patients wishing to take a brief or therapeutic absence from the unit. The Agreement also serves as acknowledgement that the patient is informed of UTMB’s policy regarding inpatient absences and releases UTMB from liability if the patient goes off UTMB’s campus.

Each patient should be strongly encouraged to notify staff before leaving their unit. Failure to do so may result in the patient being designated absent without official leave (AWOL) and discharged AMA.

The healthcare team will communicate the activity level permitted for each patient. Patients should be strongly encouraged to abide by the activity restrictions, if any, ordered by their physicians. Patient absence resulting from the failure to abide by the prescribed activity orders may result in the patient being designated AWOL and discharged AMA.

Patients who have received narcotics should be strongly encouraged to remain on the inpatient unit for at least one hour after administration. If a patient refuses or leaves without notifying staff, the patient may be designated AWOL and/or discharged AMA.

In accordance with the Inpatient Absence Agreement, 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 patient must notify staff that they are leaving the unit so the infusion can be stopped and disconnected.

Patients who fail to return to the unit at the designated time may be considered AWOL. In the event the patient does not return the nurse may notify the provider and the nurse manager (or their respective designees) to initiate discharge procedures, if appropriate.

B. 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.
2. Each patient will be strongly encouraged to notify staff before leaving their inpatient unit. 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. Parents must notify staff before a minor patient leaves their inpatient unit. Failure to do so may result in the patient being designated AWOL and discharged AMA.
3. Patients are given a copy of UTMB's Inpatient Absence Agreement during the admission process which informs them that they should not be away from the unit for longer than their designated time.

Note: Patients on telemetry and/or with infusion for narcotics, heart monitoring, and constant care devices will not be permitted to leave the unit without physician's order.

The Inpatient Absence Agreement also informs patients that failure to return to the unit within their expected return time may result in the patient being discharged as AWOL and losing their bed (see IHOP Policy 9.1.14 Patient Discharge). Patients who fail to return may be designated AWOL and discharged AMA (see IHOP Policy 9.1.14 Patient Discharge Planning).

C. Therapeutic Pass (up to five hours)

Providers may grant a therapeutic pass to patients requesting a longer absence. 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 must 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). This form will be filed in the patient's medical record.
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.
3. 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.
 - c. UTMB reserves the right to decline a therapeutic pass to patients that have IV lines and a documented abuse issue.
4. Therapeutic absences should be planned so as to not interfere with medication administration. However, providers may approve and document late or missed doses of prescribed medications as necessary. No medications may be dispensed from the patient's medication drawer.
5. Nursing staff must assess and document the patient's mental and physical status both when the patient leaves and returns to the unit.
6. The Inpatient Absence Agreement also informs patients that failure to return to the unit within their expected return time may result in the patient being discharged as absent without official leave (AWOL) and losing their bed. Prior to leaving, unit staff should remind the patient of the guidelines set out in the Agreement and that his or her bed will only be held for the duration of the pass. Patients who fail to return will be designated AWOL and discharged AMA (see IHOP Policy 9.1.14 Patient Discharge Planning). UTMB reserves the right to decline issuing future therapeutic passes to a patient that returns to the unit impaired. The patient's medical record must remain on the nursing unit, and charting will continue upon the patient's return.

D. Emergency Status Operations Guidelines

Circumstances surrounding a public health emergency may warrant additional flexibilities in inpatient policies particularly when UTMB hospitals and/or clinics are directly impacted by an emergency. UTMB will continue to ensure it has policies and procedures in place to address the needs and safety of our patients.

During a public health emergency, patients will be restricted to his or her home unit. Exceptions may be made when medically necessary in collaboration with the physician and the nurses when the patient stays on campus and is accompanied by a healthcare worker. Patients under isolation due to the public health emergency will be restricted to his or her room. If a patient under isolation does not adhere to the room restriction, UTMB may notify the County Health District to assist in issuing a control order. The procedure is set forth in the [Requesting for a Control Order for Patient to Remain in Isolation](#) document. Violation of a control order is a Class B Misdemeanor.

UTMB reserves the right to decline allowing brief off the unit absences and therapeutic passes during a public health emergency.

IV. Definitions

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

Public health emergency - An emergency need for health care services to respond to a disaster, significant outbreak of an infectious disease, bioterrorist attack or other significant catastrophic event.

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

V. Related UTMB Policies and Procedures

[IHOP - 09.01.14 - Patient Discharge Policy](#)

VI. Supporting Resources

[Requesting a Control Order for a Patient to Remain in Isolation](#)

VII. Dates Approved or Amended

<i>Originated: 12/01/1990</i>	
<i>Reviewed with Changes</i>	<i>Reviewed without Changes</i>
11/03/2011	
08/11/2016	
04/03/2020	

VIII. Contact Information

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