What does being an informal (or voluntary) patient mean?

Being an informal (or voluntary) patient means that you have come into hospital voluntarily and you are not being kept in hospital under the powers of the Mental Health Act or due to a Deprivation of Liberty Safeguard (DoLS)

Or

The section you were under has been removed by your doctor, the Hospital Managers or a Mental Health Tribunal.

This leaflet tells you about your rights as an informal, or voluntarily treated, patient and about what your medical team expects from you.

Why am I in hospital?

You are in hospital on the advice of your doctor or people who look after you in the community.

You have the same rights as any patient in an ordinary hospital.

Useful contacts

Patient Advice and Liaison Service
Wayside House
Wilsons Lane
Coventry
CV6 6NY
Telephone: 024 7653 6804 / 0800 212 445
Website: www.cowarkpt.nhs.uk

Care Quality Commission (CQC)
National Customer Service Centre
Citygate
Gallowgate
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE1 4PA
Telephone: 03000 616161
Website: www.cqc.org.uk

If you require this publication in a different format or language please contact the Trust’s Equality and Diversity Team on 024 7653 6802
What are my rights?

While you are in hospital your doctors and nurses have a duty of care towards you. This means that your wellbeing is central to their work and that all treatment they give must be beneficial to you. You cannot be legally held in hospital against your will without good reason. Your right not to be held against your will without good reason is protected under the Human Rights Act (1998) and by what is known as common law.

Our wards operate a locked door policy to help keep patients, visitors and staff safe, if you have any concerns about this please discuss with a member of staff.

As an informal patient you should be free to leave at any time. If you want to leave, please talk to the ward staff. They are responsible for your care so will need to know how long you will be away for and when you expect to return.

Whilst you are in hospital a care plan will be put together, where you and the team plan the best way to look after you. In the care plan it may suggest that you stay on the ward at particular times of the day or that it would be helpful if a staff member goes out with you. If, for example, you wanted to go for a walk late at night the staff might discourage you from doing that.

Under Section 5 of the Mental Health Act doctors and nurses can stop you from leaving if they are worried that you may harm yourself or others. If they need to use Section 5 powers, they will give you information about your rights and about what will happen to make sure you get the treatment you need.

Treatment

Treatment is likely to be taking medication, talking, answering questions and perhaps getting involved in group work with other patients. You can refuse any of the treatment and care suggested for you although, if you do, it may help if you feel you can tell the medical team why.

The right to have contact with your friends is also protected by the Human Rights Act. The hospital cannot stop you sending or receiving letters, visits or phone calls. We do ask if you could let the ward know in advance if children will be visiting so that staff can arrange a suitable room for these visits.

The NHS Constitution (2010) promises that you will be offered easy-to-understand, reliable and relevant information about NHS services and your treatment and care, to help you take part in decisions about your healthcare and to support you in making these choices.