

Admission Process



A guide for friends
and family



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Introduction

The Mental Health Commission wrote this booklet to help friends and family of people who need mental health treatment understand the admission process.

This booklet will help you understand the steps you can take if you are worried about the mental health of someone you know and believe they need care and treatment in a hospital.

This booklet will explain:



The difference between voluntary and involuntary admission



How to make an application to have someone admitted to hospital



Who can make the application



The role of the doctor in the admission process



The role of the consultant psychiatrist in the admission process

Words we use in this booklet

Admission Order

A form signed by a consultant psychiatrist to say that a person must stay in hospital for care and treatment for 21 days.

Authorised Officer

A staff member of mental health services who is authorised to make an application for the involuntary admission of an adult to hospital.

Renewal Order

A form signed by a consultant psychiatrist to extend a person's stay in hospital.

Hospital

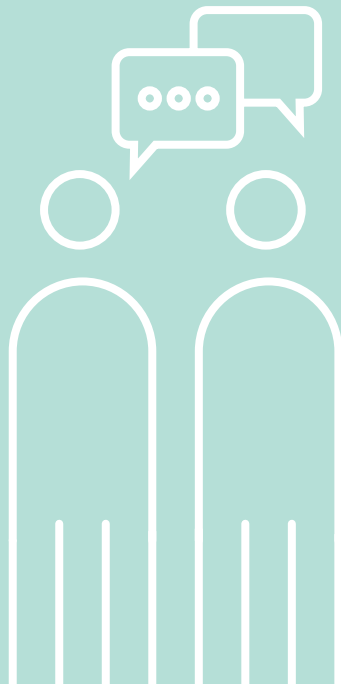
In this booklet, the word hospital means an in-patient mental health unit that is registered by the Mental Health Commission.

Mental disorder

A mental disorder is where a person has a mental illness and there is a serious risk that they may cause immediate and serious harm to themselves or others, or where they have a mental illness and their condition could get worse if they were not admitted to hospital for treatment, and going into hospital would be likely to improve their mental health significantly.

Consultant Psychiatrist

A doctor who specialises in the treatment of mental illness. They diagnose mental health conditions and prescribe treatment.



Voluntary Admission

Most people who are experiencing mental health difficulties can get the help they need without being treated in hospital.

Many people will first visit their GP, who may refer them to specialist mental health services in the community. They might attend a day centre or a mental health worker might visit them in their home.

Sometimes, people need to go into hospital for care and treatment. Most people who go into hospital for mental health care do so by choice. This is called voluntary admission and the person will be known as a 'voluntary resident'.

As a user of mental health services, the rights of voluntary residents are protected under the law. Certain procedures must be followed when a person is in hospital.

Voluntary residents can leave hospital, but they should discuss this with a member of their care team. If their doctor or nurse believes they are too unwell to go home, the doctor or nurse may decide the person needs to stay in hospital.

If this happens, they can insist that the person stays in hospital for up to 24 hours so that the person can meet and be examined by their own consultant psychiatrist and a second consultant psychiatrist.

If both consultant psychiatrists do not accept that the person has a mental disorder, they may leave hospital or may decide to stay as a voluntary resident. A person will only be admitted as an 'involuntary patient' if both consultant psychiatrists decide that they have a mental disorder.

Involuntary Admission

Sometimes a person may have to be admitted to hospital for mental health treatment against their will. This is called 'involuntary admission'.

A person can only be admitted to hospital against their will if they meet the conditions for involuntary admission. These conditions are rules set out in law to make sure a person is only admitted involuntarily if it is absolutely necessary.

A person can only be admitted to hospital against their will if they have a mental disorder.

A mental disorder is where a person has a mental illness and there is a serious risk that they may cause immediate and serious harm to themselves or others, or where they have a mental illness and their condition could get worse if they were not admitted to hospital for treatment and going into hospital would be likely to improve their mental health significantly.

There are strict procedures which must be followed in order to admit a person as an involuntary patient.

If you are worried about a friend or family member and believe they need to be admitted to hospital the following steps will need to be followed.

If the person does not meet the conditions for involuntary admission, the consultant psychiatrist will not sign the admission order. This means that the person will be free to leave the hospital. They can decide to stay in hospital as a voluntary resident and should discuss this with their care team.

There are three steps:

1

You, as a person aged 18 or over, can make an **application** to a doctor to have the person admitted to hospital. In most cases, the doctor will be that person's GP.

2

The doctor will examine the person. If the doctor thinks they meet the conditions for involuntary admission, they will make a **recommendation** that the person be admitted to hospital.

3

A consultant psychiatrist in the hospital will examine the person. If they agree that the person meets the conditions for involuntary admission, they will sign an **admission order**.



Making an Application

A person aged 18 or over can make an application to have a person admitted to hospital for mental health care and treatment. If you make an application, you are called the applicant.

The applicant fills in a form and gives it to a doctor. This doctor is usually the GP of the person who is unwell. This form asks the GP for a recommendation to admit that person involuntarily.

You must have seen the person during the 48 hours before making the application.

You must give reasons why you are making the application for admitting the person. It is against the law to give false or misleading information about this.

There may be times when the Gardaí can make an application as part of their job.

If the Gardaí believe that a person has a mental disorder and that they may harm themselves or others, they can take the person into custody.

If the Gardaí take a person into custody, they must immediately arrange for the person to be examined by a doctor. If the doctor thinks that they have a mental disorder, they will make a recommendation that the person be admitted to hospital. The Gardaí will then bring the person to the hospital that the doctor recommends.

If the doctor thinks that the person does not have a mental disorder, they will be released immediately.

People who can make an application:



The person's spouse or civil partner or relative



An authorised officer



A member of the Gardaí



Any other person aged 18 or over, except for people on the next list.

People who cannot make an application:



A member of the Gardaí who is related to the person or their spouse or civil partner



Any person who works at or for the hospital or sits on the governing board of the hospital where they may be admitted



A person who has a financial interest in the hospital where they may be admitted



A person who is under 18 years of age



Their husband or wife or civil partner who is living apart from the person or who has had an application or 'barring' order made against them under the Domestic Violence Act, 1996 as amended and the Domestic Violence Act 2018.



| The Doctor's Recommendation

The doctor must meet and examine the person within 24 hours of receiving the application form from the applicant.

The doctor may visit them at home, or the person can visit them in their surgery. The doctor will explain why they are examining the person unless they think it would not be good for their mental health. The doctor will examine their behaviour, mood and thought process.

If the doctor thinks that the person meets the conditions for involuntary admission, they will make a recommendation to admit them to hospital for mental health care and treatment.

The doctor will fill out a recommendation form. A copy of the recommendation form will be given to you as the applicant. The doctor will tell you what hospital the person might be admitted to. If the doctor does not think they meet the conditions for involuntary admission, they will not fill in a recommendation form. The person will not have to go to hospital.

If you do not agree with the decision of the doctor, as the applicant you can go to another

doctor and ask them for a recommendation. If you go to a new doctor, you must tell the new doctor that the person was already examined by another doctor.

You must tell the new doctor that the other doctor refused to fill in the recommendation form. It is against the law for the applicant not to say this to the new doctor.

The person can only stay in a hospital that is approved by the Mental Health Commission. These are known as approved centres. There are a number of approved centres around the country. A full list of approved centres is on the Commission website.

As the applicant, you should bring the person to hospital. If this is not possible, the doctor will make arrangements with the clinical director of the hospital for hospital staff to collect the person. The clinical director is the consultant psychiatrist in charge of the hospital.

If the clinical director and the doctor who made the recommendation think that the person may harm themselves or others, they may ask the Gardaí to help staff bring the person to the hospital.

The Consultant Psychiatrist's Review

When the person arrives at the hospital they will be under the care of a doctor or a nurse. A consultant psychiatrist will meet and examine them. They will discuss their care and treatment with them. This examination must happen as soon as possible or, at the latest, within 24 hours of arrival.

The consultant psychiatrist will then decide if the person has a mental disorder and whether they should stay in the hospital for treatment.

If the consultant psychiatrist believes they should stay in hospital, they will sign an admission order. The person will then become a patient in the hospital.

If they do not believe the person has a mental disorder, they will not sign the admission order and the person will be free to leave the hospital.

They may discuss the option of staying in the hospital voluntarily with a member of their care team.

The admission order lasts for 21 days. Most patients recover from a mental disorder within the first few weeks in hospital. Some may stay in hospital for longer.



Further Information

You can find more information about an involuntary stay in hospital in our booklet "Know your rights – A guide for involuntary patients receiving mental health treatment"

www.mhcirl.ie/what-we-do/mental-health-tribunals/information-patients

