

Intern's Experience with Ward Security Protocols



Reading time:
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Intern - Ward security failure

Dr R, an intern, commenced a psychiatric rotation at a regional hospital. Upon needing to enter one of the floor levels, Dr R was faced with 2 secure doors, both requiring an access card. Dr R swiped the card, entered the first door and acknowledged a person passing who they assumed was a colleague, continuing towards the staff room. Dr R was unaware of the protocols for the ward that prohibits anyone from activating a door on anyone else's behalf.

The individual that exited the ward was in fact a patient, who then absconded from the hospital and committed suicide. The family asked for an investigation into how/why the incident was able to occur. CCTV images were subsequently checked, it was discovered that Dr R had unknowingly allowed the patient to exit the ward.

The hospital advised Dr R to contact their indemnity provider due to a perceived conflict of interest between their duty of care to the patient and the vicarious responsibility they have for Dr R (their employee).

After contacting MIPS

Dr R was assisted to prepare a letter for the hospital requesting their support based on the legal principle of vicarious liability as the employer.

In the event of a civil claim by a partner, relative or dependant of the deceased person, as a hospital employee, Dr R would be employer indemnified by the hospital, given the vicarious liability. Vicarious liability means that the hospital is held responsible for the actions, ie acts/errors or omissions of their employees.

Dr R was made aware that in public hospital systems the State Insurer will usually work with the hospital and its staff, however if there is a conflict then most likely MIPS will assist with any Coronial inquest.

Key messages

- The absconding patient is far more common than people think. If you are required to work in a locked or secure ward be aware, do not be complacent and do not be scared to report an incident.
- Ensure you are always knowledgeable of and act within hospital protocols for patient and staff security. If you don't have them ask for them and read them, it is your job that could be on the line.
- Even if you are employer indemnified, MIPS can provide access to advice and support to protect our members interests and professional reputation as well as ensure you are properly indemnified

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A smiling woman with curly dark hair, wearing a grey lab coat over a white top, has a stethoscope around her neck. She is standing with her arms crossed. The background is a gradient of red and purple with a white wavy shape at the bottom.

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