



ANDREW M. CUOMO
Governor

ANN MARIE T. SULLIVAN, M.D.
Commissioner

CHRISTOPHER TAVELLA, Ph.D.
Executive Deputy Commissioner

MEMORANDUM

TO: Facility Directors, Clinical Directors, Chief Nursing Officers

FROM: Thomas Smith, Chief Medical Officer
Anita Daniels, Associate Commissioner
Dr. Grace Lee, Associate Commissioner

DATE: March 14, 2020

SUBJECT: Visitor, volunteer, and student restrictions at Psychiatric Centers

The Office of Mental Health is restricting all visitors to adults in Psychiatric Center civil and forensic inpatient units as of the end of visiting hours today, March 14, 2020. Elderly and medically frail individuals are at higher risk for severe cases of COVID-19 caused by the coronavirus. The Psychiatric Center adult population has high rates of co-occurring cardiovascular and pulmonary conditions and more than 50% have a history of heavy tobacco consumption. This population should be considered high risk for severe COVID-19 illness.

Additionally, OMH is restricting access to all Psychiatric Center civil and forensic program sites for volunteers as well as students who have no clinical responsibilities effective immediately.

Please note:

- At this point, **this visitor restriction does not apply to children and adolescents** residing in Psychiatric Center inpatient units. Psychiatric Centers should continue to follow previously issued screening guidelines for people visiting children and adolescents.
- To ensure that patients maintain communication with friends and family in the community in the absence of face-to-face visitation, **each Psychiatric Center must ensure that patients have easily available means to stay in contact with family and others.** This includes ready access to phones, either through cellular or land lines. Additionally, patients who are deemed appropriate for the use of internet social media accounts should have the means to access them as needed. Every inpatient unit must identify multiple ways for patients to communicate. See the accompanying document with draft text for notifying friends and family members.
- **Psychiatric Center staff must notify family and other identified contact persons** of this restriction as soon as possible, by phone for those who we expect to visit in the next few days and by mail or email for others, utilizing the attached letter.
- **Each Psychiatric Center must have procedures for considering exceptions to this visitor restriction,** for example for individuals involved in hearings or other legal



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matters, or when a patient's clinical status merits visitation from family or other individuals. This may include identifying a specific room for visitation, screening of visitors and keeping contact to a minimum.

- **These restrictions do not apply to residential care units on Psychiatric Center grounds.** Staff residential managers should meet with residents and advise that they should meet with visitors off grounds to the extent possible.
- **Psychiatry residents and fellows, psychology interns, and students who are already fully oriented and participating in important clinical care activities are not restricted from Psychiatric Center work at this time.** The restriction applies to all volunteers and students who are not already providing clinical care, who should be notified as soon as possible by their supervisors.

We appreciate your dedication to caring for our patients during these difficult times. Please do not hesitate to contact the Central Office with any questions.

CC:

OMH Exec Team
Matthew Erlich, MD
Matthew Perkins, MD
Daniel Silverman, MD
Christina Calderwood
Julie Burton