

# EPUT

**NHS**

Essex Partnership University  
NHS Foundation Trust

## KEEPING YOU SAFE: YOUR SEXUAL SAFETY ON THE WARD



***INFORMATION FOR SERVICE  
USERS AND CARERS***

# EPUT

## **Whilst on the ward, it is important that you feel safe and that you understand your sexual well-being matters to us.**

Below are some definitions which are important to understand. We appreciate that this could be distressing. We are here to support you.

**Sexual safety:** Feeling safe from any unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature and free from being made to feel uncomfortable, frightened or intimidated by service users or staff. Experiencing any of what is defined below means that you are not safe from sexual harm.

**Sexual consent:** Where you choose to have sexual contact with another person and have the ability to agree to do so. There may be times when someone with a health condition (mental or physical) appears to agree to have sexual contact but do not have the capacity to agree.

**Sexual violence:** Is any unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature which causes distress and takes place without consent. This may only happen once or be an ongoing series of events. Sexual violence can be broken down into:

1. **Sexual harassment:** Unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature which makes a person feel uncomfortable, intimidated, degraded or humiliated, does not respect their dignity and creates an offensive environment. A person doesn't have to previously object to someone's behaviour for it to be considered unwanted. It includes:
  - Making unsolicited remarks of a sexual nature and non-verbal sexual gestures such as intrusive staring
  - Physical advances, revealing intimate body parts, touching someone inappropriately including rubbing against someone, kissing and cuddling
  - Self-stimulation and sending or showing sexual content without consent (text, photos, audio, video, and graphic files, for any activity that involves human sexuality).
2. **Sexual assault:** When a person is pressured or forced to engage in sexual activity against their will, or when a person intentionally touches another person sexually without their agreement. Touching can be done with any part of the body or with an object. Sexual assault does not always involve

physical violence, so physical injuries or visible marks may not be seen.

**Sexual incidents:** Where a person may have witnessed or experienced something of a sexual nature which doesn't fit into the categories of sexual harassment /assault and feels sexually unsafe. This includes seeing someone being sexually inappropriate towards others and/or being naked and seeing others having sexual contact.

**Sexual abuse:** This is when a child (under 18) is pressured, forced or tricked to engage in sexual activity or is the recipient of behaviours of a sexual nature as defined above.

## Your rights to sexual safety

It is important that you tell staff if you:

- Feel uncomfortable
- Do not like something that is happening
- Want to ask questions about what is being done to you
- Do not understand why certain questions are being asked
- Want someone else present during any interaction with staff.

You should also:

- Be aware of your own feelings and behaviour and its impact on others
- Respect yourself and others.

## Keeping you sexually safe

When in our care we want to support you, to feel safe and free from harm, harassment and abuse. This includes your sexual safety and wellbeing. This is a difficult subject and requires frankness, but we will always approach it with sensitivity. You have the right to be treated with dignity and respect at all times.

During your stay, you will be with other people with health conditions (mental or physical). Part of their condition may include inappropriate behaviour which could be sexual in nature.

This may include sexual humour or inappropriate sexual or demeaning comments, being asked inappropriate questions about sex or sexual orientation or watching someone undress.

### **How we will keep you safe**

1. We will develop strategies to support someone where an aspect of their condition at that time includes inappropriate behaviour, to keep them safe while unwell. As a result there should not be an impact on you or others.
2. We will support you during your time on the ward and adhere to our policies regarding appropriate boundaries.
3. We recognise your rights to physical and psychological safety and that without this your recovery and wellbeing will be affected.
4. If necessary, we will identify any risks and put plans in place to support your sexual safety and the safety of others. If you have been sexually assaulted in the past, please inform us and we will develop a support plan for you.
5. The ward may include single gender wards, corridors and bathrooms to help keep you safe.
6. We constantly re-evaluate the ward environment to help improve sexual safety.
7. We monitor staff's professional standards and provide training on managing professional boundaries.
8. We will listen and respond quickly and appropriately to all sexual safety incidents.
9. We record all incidents and provide feedback on outcomes, in order to improve services.

### **How to keep yourself safe**

Do not go into other service user's bedrooms or into the bathroom with other service users.

# Reporting an incident

It is normal to experience a range of emotions after receiving unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature. You may feel angry, hurt or embarrassed.

We recognise how distressing telling someone of a sexual assault or harassment may be. We will listen and we will hear you.

- You must report any unwanted attention from another patient, visitor, friend, family or staff member that makes you feel sexually un-safe. We are here to help you. We can not only support you but also the others involved.
- You must report if you see someone being inappropriate with another service user.

## What to do

If you feel uncomfortable about the way someone is behaving or because of something they said:

1. Tell them no or to stop.
2. Move away from them.
3. Tell a member of staff who you feel comfortable talking to.

You can talk to:

- Your named nurse if they are available
- Someone else on the ward or ward manager
- You can ask for a member of the chaplaincy team to visit and they can talk to the staff on your behalf as your advocate.

## What we will do

1. We will listen to all sexual safety incidents and take all concerns raised with us seriously.
2. We will be compassionate and provide you with support. You should feel confident and safe.
3. We will respond appropriately. This may include involving the local authority, safeguarding team and the Police.
4. We will talk through the options so you can make an informed choice about how to proceed and put a plan in

place to keep you and other service users safe. There is no 'one size fits all' response but we will respect your wishes.

5. We may need to immediately respond and act in your best interest and for those around you, even if you don't want us to, but we will discuss or inform you at an appropriate time after the event.
6. The member of staff you speak to will share the information with the nursing team on duty.

You must be able to trust healthcare professionals to provide the best possible care and act in your best interests. Healthcare professionals and others have a duty to make sure you're safe and establish and maintain clear boundaries with you. We expect high standards of professional conduct from all our staff.

Please talk to us, the staff on the ward, if you have any concerns or have experienced or witnessed any of the issues contained in this leaflet.

## Reporting a member of staff

If a member of staff makes you feel uncomfortable and you feel that they have breached your sexual safety, you must report it because this behaviour is wrong - it may be an offence under the Sexual Offences Act 2003, a breach of the Trust's Code of Conduct and Professional Codes of Conduct.

You may feel extremely upset about what has happened. You might feel too frightened or upset to speak directly to the healthcare professional concerned.

We will proactively ensure any incidents will be robustly looked into. We will follow the same steps as laid out under *Reporting an incident*. You also have several options:

- Tell another member of staff on the unit or the ward manager. You can also talk to a member of the chaplaincy team
- Contact the Patient Feedback and Complaints Service (see back page)
- Contact the Mental Health Advocacy Services in your local area:

**Bedford & Bedfordshire** VoiceAbility: 0300 303 1660

**Essex** Rethink Advocacy: 0300 7900 559  
**Southend** SOS Advocacy Hub: 01702 340566  
**Suffolk** POhWER: 0300 456 2370  
**Thurrock** POhWER: 0300 456 2370

- Contact the Care Quality Commission on 03000 616161
- Contact the Local Social Services Department:
  - Bedford:** 01245 276222
  - Bedfordshire:** 0300 300 8122
  - Essex:** 0345 603 7630
  - Southend:** 01702 215008 (option 1)
  - Suffolk:** 0808 800 4005
  - Thurrock:** 01375 511000
- Contact the Police

### **Who will be notified when you report inappropriate behaviour?**

The member of staff you have spoken to will share the information with the nursing team who are on duty.

Depending on the situation, it may be appropriate to discuss what you have said with your consultant or the other person involved. However, you will not have to discuss it with the other person. Some hospital managers may also be informed.



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## Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

If you have any concerns or need advice about accessing NHS services, you can speak in confidence to the Patient Advice and Liaison Service on **0800 085 7935** or you can email [epunft.pals@nhs.net](mailto:epunft.pals@nhs.net)

This leaflet can be produced in large print, CD, Braille and other languages on request.



Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust regards equality and diversity as integral to the way it works. Our staff will ensure that everyone is treated fairly and no one is discriminated against on the basis of their ethnicity, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation and religion or belief.

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