Behavioral Health Patient Room: Common Hazards

Reports submitted to PA-PSRS illustrate common hazards in the behavioral health patient room. Match the objects to the descriptions below.

1. **Nonsafety mirror.** PA-PSRS has received reports of patients who broke mirrors and then cut themselves with the shards.

2. **Towel bar.** Nonbreakaway attachment points such as towel bars, shower rods, or closet rods may present a hanging hazard (e.g., see clothing, blanket).

3. **Exposed plumbing.** Exposed waste and supply plumbing and some large fixtures may present hanging or cutting hazards. PA-PSRS has received one report of a patient who broke off a bathroom sink faucet and then used it to self-inFLICT cuts.

4. **Large-opening, unsecured heating, ventilating, and air-conditioning grille.** Large-opening grilles that have not been secured with tamper-resistant screws and/or do not have a protective mesh in place may be removed by patients and used to inflict self harm. PA-PSRS has received one report of a patient who removed the screws from a room vent and then used the grille slats to self-inFLICT wrist lacerations.

5. **Shoes with laces.** PA-PSRS has received several reports of patients who attempted suicide using shoelaces for strangulation.

6. **Telephone with cord.** When unsupervised patients have access to telephones with cords, the cord may be used for strangulation, as seen in reports submitted to PA-PSRS.

7. **Picture frame with glass.** PA-PSRS has received one report of a patient who broke the glass in a picture frame and then used a shard to cut the jugular vein.

8. **Unapproved medication.** PA-PSRS has received reports of visitors who brought patients unapproved medication and reports of patients who hid both legal and illegal drugs in their rooms.

9. **Stolen or left-behind eating utensils.** PA-PSRS has received reports of patients who cut themselves with plastic or metal eating utensils that were concealed from staff.

(Continued on next page)
10. **Stolen or left-behind pens or pencils.** PA-PSRS has received reports of patients who cut or self-inflicted puncture wounds with pens or pencils.

11. **Unanchored lamp.** If table lamps are provided (the literature discourages such use; see “References”) but not anchored to a surface, they can be used by patients to injure others or to inflict self harm (e.g., an electrical cord presents a strangulation hazard). Additionally, PA-PSRS has received reports of patients who broke lightbulbs and cut themselves with the glass.

12. **Large-opening grille, unsecured light fixture.** When light fixtures are within reach of patients, the potential for patient harm exists; for example, patients can use the fixture to attempt hanging, can injure themselves with glass from the fixture if not secured with tamper-resistant screws, or can injure themselves with glass from the lightbulb.

13. **Nonrecessed fire sprinkler.** Sprinklers that are not recessed or are not designed to minimize patient access may be used as attachment points to attempt hanging.

14. **Unsecured window.** Windows that lack security features (e.g., tempered glass, reinforced protective screens) can present a patient safety risk. PA-PSRS has received one report of a patient who died after breaking through a window, which had a protective screen in place, and then falling from the upper-story room.

15. **Extended cord on blind.** Reports submitted to PA-PSRS indicate that patients have used cords to strangle themselves or attempt hanging.

16. **Unanchored or sharp-edged furniture.** Furniture that is unanchored (i.e., not bolted to the floor), with the exception of desk chairs, may present a patient safety risk (e.g., self-injury). Similar concerns may exist when furniture has sharp edges or nonrecessed handles.

17. **Unsecured electrical cord.** Accessible, long electrical cords may present a strangulation hazard.

18. **Unsecured electrical cover plate.** Electrical cover plates that have not been secured with tamper-resistant screws or are made of materials other than polycarbonate may be removed by patients and used to cut themselves or others. In addition, PA-PSRS has received one report of a patient who removed the cover plate of an electrical outlet and then used a piece of tinfoil to attempt electrocution.

19. **Trash can.** Plastic trash bags may present a suffocation hazard. Additionally, trash cans that are sturdy may be used as steps to attempt hanging.

20. **Loose blanket.** PA-PSRS has received one report of a patient who attempted suicide by fashioning a noose with a blanket and securing it to a closet rod.

21. **Clothing.** PA-PSRS has received more than 25 reports of patients who attempted to strangle themselves using clothing. There have been at least two reported deaths by hanging with clothing.

22. **Belt.** PA-PSRS has received one report of a patient who died by strangulation with a belt.

**References**


For more information visit: www.psa.state.pa.us

This illustration was adapted from “Diligence and Design in Behavioral Health Impact Patient Safety.” *PA-PSRS Patient Safety Advisory, September 2007. Vol. 4, No. 3.*