

Commissioner's Policy Statement and Implementing Procedures

SUBJECT/POLICY NAME:	Use of: Personal Computers/Electronic Devices and DMHAS Computers/Electronic Devices and Internet / Email in the Inpatient Setting
POLICY CHAPTER	INFORMATION MANAGEMENT
APPROVED BY:	COMMISSIONER'S POLICY GROUP
EFFECTIVE DATE:	DATE: 07/07/2025
LAST REVISED DATE :	DATE: 07/07/2025
POLICY OWNER	INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: DMHAS recognizes that the use of computers / electronic devices / internet / email is an important part of modern society, and is essential for communication, information access, work, finance, and education. DMHAS patients can use DMHAS computers / electronic devices / internet / email to, for example, gather information about their illness and treatment options, assist in discharge planning, and maintain community support.

POLICY: While DMHAS supports reasonable patient use of the computers/ electronic devices / internet / email within parameters established in this policy, DMHAS also recognizes that unrestricted and unmonitored access can pose a danger to the safe and secure functioning of DMHAS hospitals and may compromise the facilities' responsibilities for assuring patient privacy and confidentiality and public safety. Such dangers include but are not limited to attempts to AWOL (absent without leave) while still at risk to the public, contacting victims of a crime, and potentially compromising other patients' confidential information. Therefore, for safety reasons, it is necessary to restrict and monitor **all** patients' access to DMHAS approved computers / electronic devices / internet / email.

As used in this policy, electronic devices include, but are not limited to, tablets, iPads, and similar devices, but do not include personal gaming devices and cellular phones, which remain subject to individual facilities' policies.

DMHAS will make available to its patients access to computers / electronic devices / internet / email in a safe and secure way through the following procedure designed to assist staff in managing and monitoring patients' use of DMHAS devices and patients' use of computers / electronic devices / internet / email.

Patients' personal computers, tablets, and other similar devices that can provide internet access are prohibited. These devices are prohibited even if their capability to connect to the internet has been disabled.

A. PROCEDURE: Patient Access to and Use of DMHAS Computers / Electronic devices / Internet / Email.

1. ***Approval of Patient Access.*** A patient's ability and permission to use DMHAS computers / electronic devices and to have access to the internet / email will be based on clinical appropriateness and must be approved by the patient's treatment team on an individualized basis and the determination will be documented in the patient's medical record.
2. ***Patient Supervision.*** Patients using a DMHAS computer / electronic device that has access to the internet / email must be under staff supervision. Staff supervision is necessary to ensure that there is no access to unapproved sites or unapproved contact(s) and that its use does not present safety concerns or interfere with treatment goals and objectives. Each DMHAS facility shall establish a monitoring system, with any patient-specific parameters documented in the patient's treatment plan.
3. ***Social Media Site Use/Access is Strictly Prohibited for Non-Therapeutic Purposes.*** Patient use of DMHAS computers / electronic devices / internet / email to visit or access social media sites for non-therapeutic purposes is prohibited. If a patient accesses a social media site for non-therapeutic purposes while in the inpatient setting, their access to computers / electronic devices / internet / email may be restricted if deemed appropriate based on the treatment team's review.
4. ***Patient Computer Use in the Community.*** When on staff-supervised community trips, any use of computers / electronic devices / internet / email must be under DMHAS staff's supervision, regardless of the presence, observation, or assistance of any community person (e.g., public library staff). Social media site use is subject to subsection A.3. of this policy. Patients under the jurisdiction of the Psychiatric Security Review Board (PSRB) spending time in the community are required to comply with their individualized monitoring and oversight requirements as articulated in the operative Memorandum of Decision as

ordered by the PSRB.

B. Patient Access to and Use of Email.

Purpose. Patient access to and use of email is permitted on a limited, patient-by-patient basis, and only for specific treatment purposes that must be specified in the patient's treatment plan. The treatment plan must include relevant and meaningful goals and objectives related to the patient's treatment and/or discharge plan which necessitates email use (i.e., housing, employment, benefit applications, etc.).

1. **Treatment Team and Medical Director's Approval.** Patient access to and use of email through DMHAS computers or computers in the community must be reviewed and approved by the treatment team and the medical director or designee of the DMHAS facility. Once approved, the Attending Psychiatrist must write an order on the Physician Order sheet that includes the specific treatment purpose for the patient's use of email.
2. **Limits of Privacy.** Patients must be informed that they should have no expectation of privacy when using DMHAS computers. Additionally, they should be informed that information stored, created, sent, or received via DMHAS computers is accessible to the public under the Freedom of Information Act. Treatment teams must inform each patient of the limits of privacy. To document that each patient has been informed of such privacy limitations, each DMHAS facility shall have the patient (and conservator of person, if applicable) sign a document that indicates that they were so informed and decided to proceed. This document shall be made part of the patient's medical record.

C. Patient Misuse of Computers, Electronic devices, the Internet, or Email

Any suspected violation of this procedure or other unauthorized or inappropriate use of computers / electronic devices / internet / email /social media sites must be immediately reported to:

- The patient's treatment team,
- The supervising staff's immediate supervisor, and
- Information Technology or designee for assistance in reviewing the incident, securing technical details and mitigation.

Any suspected violation of this procedure or inappropriate use of computers / electronic devices / internet / email / social media sites shall be reviewed by each DMHAS facility's leadership and may result in the suspension of a patient's privilege to access and use the computers / electronic devices / internet / email / social media sites. Any violation may, as required, be referred to the appropriate authority for further review or action.

This policy supersedes any other existing policy related to the use of DMHAS, personal, or publicly available computers / electronic devices / internet / email / social media sites for patients in the inpatient setting.

FORMS AND ATTACHMENTS: (to be published separately)