



## MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES POLICY

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA \* DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WELFARE

DATE OF  
ISSUE  
  
2/28/05

EFFECTIVE  
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03/01/2005

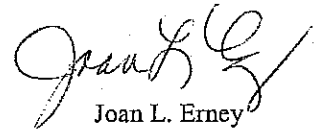
NUMBER

SMH-05-01

SUBJECT

Unscheduled Use of Medication in the State Hospital System  
PRN & STAT Medication Orders

BY

  
Joan L. Erney  
Deputy Secretary for Mental Health  
and Substance Abuse Services

**Scope:** State Mental Health Hospitals and Restoration Center

**Purpose:** To establish a uniform policy for the use of PRN and STAT physician orders within the state hospital system.

**Background:** The use of unscheduled medications has been a long-standing practice in both private and public healthcare facilities. The practice involves a physicians order for a specific medication that is given for pain or symptom relief. PRN and STAT physician orders for unscheduled medications have been permitted for medical and psychiatric reasons within the state hospital system. The term PRN, an abbreviation for "Pro-Re-Nata" meaning, "as the occasion arises", are written physician orders that authorize a nurse to give a specific medication at a specified dose for a designated reason when needed. PRN orders are time limited and cannot exceed 30-days. A PRN order provides for unscheduled doses of medicine without an examination or contact with a physician. STAT orders, referred to as "now" orders for medication, are given to a nurse based upon a physician's assessment of an individual's medical or psychiatric condition. STAT orders require a physician's order for every unscheduled use of medication.

Each state hospital has had unique policies that govern the use of unscheduled medication. They range from the total prohibition of PRN orders for psychiatric indications to 30-day standing orders. Furthermore, one recent research study has shown that the use of PRN orders for psychiatric indications may expose consumers to unnecessary medications that have the potential to extend hospital stays. In addition, some medications are habit forming and may exacerbate an individual's psychiatric condition. Finally, the use of unscheduled medication must be consistent with State and Federal regulations, policies, and initiatives that discourage and/or prohibit the use of medication as a chemical restraint.

**Policy:** In order to maximize the quality of decision making regarding the need for any unscheduled medication the following policy shall apply:

### Psychiatric Use

1. PRN medication orders for psychiatric indications shall be prohibited.
2. STAT medication orders for psychiatric indications shall be permitted when a physician conducts a face-to-face assessment of the individual consumer. Telephone orders for STAT medications are also permitted with the requirement that the ordering physician sees the person within one hour. In both situations, the medication ordered must be approved for use with the individual's diagnosis/condition/indication.

**Medical Use**

1. PRN medication orders for medical indications are permitted. PRN orders shall not exceed a 28-day period and must specify the specific diagnosis/condition/indication for use, medication name, dose, route, minimum spacing between doses, maximum daily dose and duration of the order.
2. STAT medication orders for medical indications are permitted by this policy. The need to make a face-to-face assessment of the person will be determined by the physician. Telephone orders for STAT medications are also permitted. In both situations, the medication ordered must be approved for use with the individual's diagnosis/condition/indication.

All hospitals shall adjust their operational medication policies to reflect these changes on or before March 1, 2005.

Comments and questions regarding this policy should be directed to:

Bureau of Hospital Operations Director