

The Behavioral Health Unit: Basics for Your Stay

What is a behavioral health unit?

Sometimes called the psychiatric unit, the behavioral health unit (BHU) is an area of the hospital designed specifically for providing mental health care.

People typically need care in a BHU because their symptoms are serious and unstable or they are at risk for harming themselves or others. The main goal of the unit is to provide a safe, secure place where people receive treatment and move beyond the immediate crisis.

It is important that you continue treatment after your stay in a BHU. You will need to make and go to all follow-up appointments with your outpatient mental health provider.

How is this unit different from other hospital areas?

The behavioral health unit has a lot of open, shared space. This makes it easier for patients and staff to communicate, creates areas for group meetings, and generally supports treatment goals. Patients often eat meals together in a dining room.

Behavioral health unit procedures are also different from other hospital areas. For example, the unit is kept locked. Also, patients can bring in only a small number of personal items. Staff members will explain what is allowed. For example, you can bring paperback books and extra clothes, but you will probably need to use hospital toiletries. Limiting who and what comes in and out of the unit makes the space more secure and helps everyone focus on the well-being of each patient.

The BHU is a calm, lower-stress environment. This is because visiting times are limited and callers and visitors must have a special security code to speak with patients or enter the unit. This practice helps reduce interruptions and distractions, so patients can focus on their treatment.

BHU staff members check on patients frequently, around the clock. The unit staff are here to help you and keep you safe. (If you have any questions during your stay, be sure to ask.)

What treatment can I expect?

Treatment is tailored to your individual needs. You can expect your care to include these basic elements:

- **Work with a multidisciplinary team.** A typical care team includes people with different training and specialties. For example, you might work with a doctor, nurse practitioner, nurse, psychiatric tech, and social worker or therapist.
- **Treatment plan.** The team will work with you to develop a treatment plan based on your needs. The plan includes assessing the medicines you take, your physical health, individual and group therapy, and plans for discharge.
- **Medicine.** It is vital that the right person gets the right medicine. As in any area of the hospital, staff will double-check your identity before giving you medicine. They will typically ask you to confirm your name and birthday and will then check your responses against the information on your wristband or other ID.
- **Safety plan.** The team will work with you to develop a safety plan in case of emergency or mental health crisis after you go home. This plan will list sources of support and coping strategies for you to use.

Use the boxes below to write down key information about your care while in the behavioral health unit.

Who is on my care team?

Write names of your care team members below.

- Staff physician: _____
- Nurse Practitioner: _____
- Nurse: _____
- Social worker: _____
- Other: _____

What is my treatment plan?

You and your care team will come up with goals for your treatment and plan to help you reach them. Record key elements of your plan below.

- My goals: _____
- _____
- My strengths (qualities that will help me meet my goals): _____
- _____
- Therapy (what type, with whom?): _____
- _____
- Medicines (what type, for what?): _____
- _____

What is my daily schedule?

Use the area below to write down when you have meals, take your medicines, have therapy sessions, or whatever makes sense to you.

- Mornings: _____
- _____
- Afternoons: _____
- _____
- Evenings: _____
- _____

Questions for my care team

Write down your questions as you think of them. Your team is happy to answer your questions, so please ask!

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