

APA Official Actions

Position Statement on Arrests of Psychiatric Inpatients for Violence

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“Policy documents are approved by the APA Assembly and Board of Trustees. . . These are . . . position statements that define APA official policy on specific subjects. . .” – *APA Operations Manual*

Issue:

Psychiatric care involving patients in inpatient settings who engage in violent behavior can be fraught with clinical, ethical, moral, legal, and regulatory dilemmas. Behavioral dysregulation is a common occurrence among individuals with mental disorders requiring hospitalization and is frequently the very reason for that level of care. Patients and staff may be frightened by violent acts witnessed or experienced on inpatient psychiatric units.

APA Position:

It is the position of the APA that, in the case of inpatients who engage in violent behavior, pressing charges or requesting removal of those patients via arrest should only occur after appropriate clinical assessment and when more intensive clinical intervention is not sufficient to prevent further violence. The APA supports the use of alternative clinical options, including but not limited to reassessing clinical interventions and/or referral to a more secure treatment setting prior to seeking arrest of a patient. This position does not preclude an individual person who has been the victim of a patient assault from filing criminal charges.

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