

Discharge/Termination from Practice and Communication Policy

Sunflower Mountain Mental Health (SMMH)

Effective Date: January 1, 2025

Purpose

Sunflower Mountain Mental Health (SMMH) is committed to providing high-quality mental health care while maintaining a safe, professional, and respectful treatment environment. This policy outlines the circumstances under which **patient discharge or termination of care** may occur and the communication standards required for ongoing care coordination. This policy complies with **Medicare, Medicaid, HIPAA, and Colorado healthcare regulations**.

Scope

This policy applies to all patients receiving services from SMMH and governs **voluntary and involuntary discharge procedures**, communication expectations, and patient responsibilities.

Reasons for Discharge/Termination of Care

SMMH may discontinue care for patients under the following circumstances, including but not limited to:

1. **Non-Compliance with Communication Policies**
 - a. **Failure to use secure communication methods** (e.g., continued misuse of standard email or text for PHI after being advised to use the CharmHealth portal or Spruce secure messaging).
 - b. **Excessive or inappropriate messaging** (e.g., frequent non-urgent messages or repeated failure to respect response times outlined in the **Secure Electronic Communication & Patient Consent Policy**).
 - c. **Misuse of scheduling systems** (e.g., repeatedly rescheduling or canceling outside of the **Attendance and Cancellation Policy** guidelines).
2. **Violation of Practice Policies**
 - a. **Failure to follow prescribed treatment plans** despite multiple provider recommendations.
 - b. **Refusal to adhere to the Controlled Substance Management Policy** regarding medication monitoring, random screenings, or secure prescribing guidelines.

- c. **Repeated late cancellations or no-shows**, as outlined in the **Attendance and Cancellation Policy**.
- 3. **Disruptive or Inappropriate Behavior**
 - a. **Verbal aggression, harassment, or threats** directed at staff, providers, or other patients.
 - b. **Hostile, abusive, or inappropriate communication** through email, text, voicemail, or in-person interactions.
 - c. **Arriving to appointments under the influence** of substances that impair participation in treatment.
- 4. **Financial Non-Compliance**
 - a. Failure to pay for services as outlined in the **Billing & Financial Assistance Policy**.
 - b. Repeated failure to update insurance or payment information.
- 5. **Higher Level of Care Required**
 - a. The provider determines that the patient **requires a higher level of care than SMMH can provide**.
 - b. Patients with **chronic crises, suicidal behaviors, or emergency-level psychiatric needs** will be referred to inpatient care or specialized crisis services.
 - c. If a patient requires **immediate psychiatric stabilization** or a **higher level of care** beyond outpatient services, they will be provided with **crisis referrals** in accordance with the **Crisis & Emergency Response Policy**. This includes:
 - i. Referral to emergency mental health services or inpatient care.
 - ii. Coordination with crisis hotlines, hospital psychiatric units, or intensive outpatient programs.
 - iii. Ensuring the patient is connected to appropriate emergency support resources.
 - d. **Refusal to engage in referrals or recommended care coordination** may result in discharge from outpatient services.
- 6. **Violation of Controlled Substance Agreements**
 - a. **Misuse, diversion, or failure to comply with controlled substance treatment plans**, as outlined in the **Controlled Substance Management Policy**.
 - b. **Repeated positive toxicology results for non-prescribed substances** or failure to complete required urine drug screenings.

Voluntary Discharge

Patients may **choose to discontinue services** with SMMH at any time. To ensure continuity of care, patients are encouraged to:

- **Notify SMMH in writing or through the CharmHealth portal.**

- Request a **final follow-up appointment** if needed for care transition.
- Obtain a copy of their medical records if they are transitioning to another provider.

Involuntary Discharge Process

For involuntary discharges, the following steps will be taken:

1. **Review & Documentation**
 - a. Providers will **document the reason for discharge** and any prior warnings or corrective actions taken.
 - b. A provider review will be conducted to determine if termination is appropriate.
2. **Notice of Termination**
 - a. Patients will receive a **written termination notice** via secure message, email, or certified mail.
 - b. The notice will include:
 - i. **Reason for discharge**
 - ii. **Effective discharge date** (minimum **31-day notice** unless immediate termination is required for safety concerns)
 - iii. **Referrals for continued care**
3. **Temporary Continuation of Care**
 - a. During the notice period, **SMMH will provide urgent medication refills and limited crisis support** to ensure a smooth transition.
 - b. If a patient poses an immediate **safety risk, termination may occur without a 31-day notice**, and emergency referrals will be made.
4. **Patient Assistance with Transition**
 - a. SMMH will assist discharged patients by:
 - i. **Providing referral lists for alternative providers.**
 - ii. **Facilitating record transfers** upon patient request.
 - iii. **Offering resources for crisis and emergency services** if needed.

Emergency Discharges & Immediate Termination

Immediate termination may occur without prior notice under the following conditions:

- **Physical violence, credible threats, or harassment** toward staff, providers, or other patients.
- **Legal violations or fraudulent use of insurance/medical services.**
- **Significant policy violations that endanger clinic operations or other patients.**

For immediate safety concerns, patients will be directed to appropriate **law enforcement, crisis services, or emergency mental health providers.**

Appealing a Discharge Decision

Patients who believe their discharge was made in error may submit an appeal in writing within **10 business days** of receiving the termination notice. Appeals should be sent to:

- **Phone/Text:** (719) 679-5022
- **Mail:** Sunflower Mountain Mental Health, 805 Eagleridge Boulevard, Suite 140, Pueblo, CO 81008

Appeals will be reviewed by **SMMH leadership**, and a final decision will be provided within **14 business days**.

Communication Expectations for Patients

To maintain professional and effective care, SMMH requires patients to:

- **Use appropriate communication methods** (secure portal, Spruce, or office phone for official requests).
- **Respect provider response times** (non-urgent requests may take up to **72 hours** for a response).
- **Avoid inappropriate, excessive, or aggressive messaging.**

Failure to adhere to these expectations may result in communication restrictions or discharge.

***Last Updated:** March 2025*

For further assistance, please contact SMMH at **(719) 679-5022** or visit www.sunflowermountainmentalhealth.com.