

Sent: 10/11/2008 03:25 PM

To: <mhactreview@dhs.vic.gov.au>

Subject: Review of the Mental Health Act - access to telephones and equivalent communication methods

Hello

I would like to suggest that any amendments to the act include additions to the present 'rights to communication' guaranteed in the present 1986 Act which specifically mention the right of patients to access to telephones and post.

As well as these methods, any 'Mental Health Act for the Twenty First Century' should include at a minimum Email access and access to the Internet.

Email is no longer a luxury or something for 'computer geeks', but a part of the way a great many ordinary Australians keep up with family. interests, work and study.

When the subject of internet access was raised during the last 2 decades one common response was 'It will be abused, used badly.'

This is no longer a prohibitive consideration when

- * software is available, as used in schools to enforce 'safe surfing',
- * computer access can be easily controlled by varying access levels and passwords, and
- * individual wireless internet access which requires no access to existing hospital networks, issues of abuse are no longer a serious consideration.

And if a particular patient may at times use the present telephone access inappropriately has never been seen a sufficient reason to deny access to phones to all the other patients.

Instead, other measures are used to prevent abuse by specific patients when unwell -

- * management plans,
- * specialling by a nurse,
- * going to a Higher Dependency Unit within a ward etc.

Why cannot an internet kiosk, coin operated if necessary, be available next to the patient's phone or if really needed in a lockable room under supervision?

There is no reason at all, except perhaps conservatism and unwarranted suspicion of the whole idea of the 'World Wide Web'

With more and more young people using mental health services, keeping them involved in their community and lives involve more than just mail and telephone access - it involves the communication methods of their century.

Please consider moving the ACT into the modern world by adding the right to email and internet access

William Moon