

Patient Safety Alert

Veterans Health Administration Warning System
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Item: Use of elastic-hemmed fitted bed sheets in mental health units and other units holding or treating actively suicidal patients

Specific Incident: A VA medical center reported that a patient attempted suicide in a locked mental health unit using the elastic hem from a fitted bed sheet as a ligature. The patient ripped the sheet at the hem (as shown in the photo below), tied a loop, placed the loop around his neck and pulled the elastic portion tight. No anchor point was involved in this event.



General Information: While any bed sheet can be used as a ligature, elastic-hemmed fitted bed sheets are more dangerous as the elastic may remain tightened, even after the patient has passed out and stopped applying tension.

Actions:

1. By Close of Business (COB) April 12, 2011, the **Medical Center Director (or designee)** must ensure all staff working in mental health units and other units holding or treating actively suicidal patients (e.g., Emergency Department holding areas for suicidal patients, Psychiatric Emergency Departments) are made aware of this Patient Safety Alert.

2. By COB May 24, 2011, the **Medical Center Director (or designee)** must ensure that elastic-hemmed fitted bed sheets are no longer used in mental health units and other units holding or treating actively suicidal patients (e.g., Emergency Department holding areas for suicidal patients, Psychiatric Emergency Departments). Elastic-hemmed fitted bed sheets must be replaced with either non-elastic-hemmed fitted bed sheets (see the Additional Information section) or flat bed sheets.

The decision to purchase and use either non-elastic-hemmed fitted bed sheets or flat bed sheets is a local decision, best made with input from mental health staff and textile professionals. Facilities need to be sure to follow local purchasing protocols. If both types of fitted bed sheets (elastic-hemmed and non-elastic-hemmed) are available for use in a facility, a system must be instituted to prevent the elastic-hemmed fitted bed sheets from being returned to or used in mental health units and other units holding or treating actively suicidal patients (e.g., Emergency Department holding areas for suicidal patients, Psychiatric Emergency Departments).

NOTE: This Alert is specific to elastic-hemmed fitted bed sheets and is not intended to suggest that other items which generally do not have non-elastic alternatives (e.g. pajama pants, underwear, brassieres) be removed from the units.

3. By COB May 27, 2011, the **Patient Safety Manager** will document on the VHA Hazard Alerts and Recalls website that facility leadership has reviewed and implemented these actions.

Additional Information: The Mental Health Environment of Care Checklist has been developed for locked mental health units in VHA facilities and has recommendations for reducing suicide hazards. The Checklist has been revised to reflect the vulnerability described in this Patient Safety Alert:

<http://www.patientsafety.gov/SafetyTopics.html#mheocc>

Non-elastic-hemmed fitted bed sheets that meet the requirements of this Patient Safety Alert are available from the following suppliers, with those suppliers who have products on VA FSS contract listed first.

NOTE: VHA does not endorse the following suppliers or products and acknowledges that other products may be commercially available and that some of the products below could be offered by additional suppliers (i.e., this is a not an exhaustive list).

VA Federal Supply Schedule (FSS) contract:

- Encompass Group LLC, FSS contract # V797P-4256b, category A-33A (Disposable Hospital Clothing), Telephone: (770) 957-3981. **NOTE: Regardless of what the category indicates, the three non-elastic-hemmed fitted bed sheets listed below are reusable sheets, intended for laundering.**
 - Item #: 49452-20B. Description: MIP sheet fitted sleep-knit plus (twin, 16.6 oz., 60% cotton/40% polyester, envelope design/elastic free, white).
 - Item #: 49452-2BP. Description: MIP sheet fitted sleep-knit (twin, 19.5 oz., 100% polyester, envelope design/elastic-free, white).
 - Item #: 49452-25B. Description: MIP sheet fitted sleep-knit (twin, 24 oz., 100% polyester, envelope design/elastic-free, white).
- Med-I-Pant (MIP), Inc., FSS contract # V797P-4159A, category A-26A (Pads, Bed Linen, Protective), Telephone: (800) 361-4964. **NOTE: Regardless of what the category indicates, the two non-elastic-hemmed fitted bed sheets listed below are reusable sheets, intended for laundering.**
 - Catalog #: SK2000B. Description: twin, 16.6 oz., 60% cotton/40% polyester, envelope design bottom sheet, no elastic, white with ribbed knit binding.
 - Catalog #: SK2500B. Description: twin, 24 oz., 100% polyester, ultra knit envelope design bottom sheet, no elastic, white with green binding.

US General Services Administration (GSA) schedule contract:

- American Textiles Systems, GSA contract # GS-07F-5967P, category 852 7 (Linens), Telephone: (888) 737-2689. **NOTE: The two non-elastic-hemmed fitted bed sheets listed below are not currently available on the GSA Advantage! website. The supplier states the products will be available on the website by April 13, 2011.**
 - Item #: 15099. Description: twin, 19 oz., cotton/polyester, knitted fitted sheet, no elastic, white.
 - Stock #: KFSTUSAVA. Description: twin, 18 oz., cotton/polyester, knitted fitted sheet, no elastic, white.

Source: A VA Medical Center

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