Subject: FREE CARE

Reference:
Hospital Fair Pricing Act: California Health & Safety Code (HSC) § 127400-127446; Title 22 of the California Code of Regulations §96051-96051.37; Assembly Bill 1020; AB 2297

FORM(S) REFERENCE:
POLICY REFERENCE NUMBER: 02-01-86 Debt Collection

PURPOSE:

This policy describes San Diego County Psychiatric Hospital's (SDCPH) Financial Assistance policy of providing "Free Care." SDCPH provides Free Care to all patients and does not bill patients directly for inpatient or outpatient services. SDCPH may bill Medi-Cal for eligible services; however, patients are not required to apply for Medi-Cal or provide proof of financial need to access Free Care. The intent of this policy is to comply with applicable federal, state and local laws and regulations. SDCPH does not discriminate and is fair in reviewing and assessing eligibility for Financial Assistance for community members who may need financial help.

POLICY:

SDCPH is committed to providing Financial Assistance to patients who seek needed behavioral healthcare services but have limited, or no means, to pay for that care. SDCPH's Financial Assistance is to provide Free Care to all patients. There are no eligibility requirements, no application process and no financial determination forms required in order to receive Free Care.

DEFINITIONS:

Definitions are included only to align with regulatory compliance. Definitions not used in the administration of Free Care have been omitted.

A. Application: SDCPH does not require an application to receive Free Care.

B. Charity Care: As of January 1, 2025, Charity Care is referred to as "Free Care." Free Care is provided when the patient is not expected to pay the patient's payment obligation for items and services provided by SDCPH. Free Care is provided to all patients, regardless of their financial need.

C. Eligibility: There are no eligibility requirements. All patients receive Free Care regardless of their income or insurance status.

D. Financial Assistance: Free Care.

E. Medically Necessary Care: A service is "medically necessary" or a "medical necessity" when it is performed in the hospital unless the hospital provides an attestation signed by the referring provider that the hospital services at issue were not medically necessary.

PROCEDURE(S):

A. Access to Financial Assistance Policy

SDCPH makes information about its Free Care Policy available through numerous means in compliance with applicable state and federal laws and regulations.

All patients will be notified of the Free Care Policy at multiple times during their care, including:

- Verbal notification upon hospital admission and discharge.
- Written notification in patients' welcome packets and discharge notice.
- Providing translated materials in the County's threshold languages.
- Physical postings in public hospital areas, such as Emergency Psychiatric Unit (EPU) and the Admissions area.
- Online access via the hospital's website.

There are no application or eligibility forms required to receive Free Care. Information about this policy is available on the hospital's website home page and on any website where the patient would pay a bill or accesses information about the patient's account, posted in hospital areas that are accessible to the public, such as the Emergency Psychiatric Unit (EPU) or Admissions area, and by plain language summaries provided to all patients. Hospital personnel shall direct patients, guardians, or family members who request Financial Assistance or information about Financial Assistance to the Social Work Supervisor to receive a paper copy of this Policy.

An explanation of SDCPH's Free Care Policy is available at: https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/hhsa/programs/bhs/SDCPH.html

B. Other Forms of Health Coverage

Although SDCPH provides Free Care to all patients, SDCPH shall assist all patients with information about applying for Medi-Cal, Medicare or other public health insurance coverage options if they express interest. However, applying for such programs is not required to receive Free Care.

C. Debt Collection Protections

SDCPH does not bill patients, sell patient debt or assign accounts to debt collectors.

D. Application Process

There is no application process or application required. Every patient is provided with Free Care.

E. How to Ask for Help

A patient may request assistance with understanding the Free Care policy by contacting any social worker. Additionally, there are free consumer advocacy organizations that will help the patient navigate healthcare access and financial assistance programs. The patient can also call the Health Consumer Alliance at 888-804-3536 or go to

healthconsumer.org for more information.

F. Eligibility

SDCPH provides Free Care to all patients. There is no application or eligibility criteria.

G. Shoppable Services

SDCPH does not maintain or publish a list of shoppable services because those services are no provided. SDCPH does not provide elective or outpatient services that meet the criteria for “shoppable services,” as defined by the Center for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) and the California Department of Health Care Access and Information (HCAI).

All behavioral health services provided at SDCPH are medically necessary, urgent or deemed as emergency psychiatric care. These services cannot be scheduled by patients in advance as “shoppable,” and they are not offered on a discretionary or elective basis.