

AIMS-SC4Y: Why is this important for adult wards?

Mental Health Act (2007) 'Age-Appropriate Environment' Amendment

Section 31 of the 2007 amendments to the 1983 Mental Health Act (MHA) requires Hospital Managers to ensure that under 18 year olds are admitted to an environment suitable for their age (subject to their need). This applies to both detained and informal patients.

The amendment allows for admission to an adult ward if the need is either:

- **Overriding:** when a young person needs immediate admission for their safety or that of others. This acknowledges that, although an inpatient CAMHS unit is normally the preferred environment for a person under age 18, there will be occasions when a bed or other CAMHS alternative (e.g. intensive outreach) is not available. The revised Code of Practice (2008) states that if a young person is admitted in a crisis it should be for the briefest time possible.
- **Atypical:** when, even if a CAMHS bed was available, an adult ward is the most appropriate clinical placement. For example, a young person nearly 18 who has left school and is being treated by the 'Early Intervention Psychosis' team, which has beds on the ward to which the young person will be admitted, or a 17 and a half year old new mother who has severe post-natal depression and may be more appropriately served by a 'Mother and Baby Mental Health Unit', than placing the young person on a CAMHS unit and separating her from her baby. However, even in these circumstances there is still an obligation to ensure that safeguards are in place for an under 18 year old in line with their status as a minor.

Section 31(3) will commence on **1 April 2010**.

Important note: Save for exceptional circumstances, all children and young people under 18 in need of in-patient treatment should be admitted to a child or adolescent mental health ward. The 2007 'Age Appropriate Environment' amendment to the 1983 Act, which comes into force in April 2010, is concerned with ensuring that the admission is appropriate for the young person at the time in-patient care is being considered. It does not prevent the admission of a young person (16 – 17 years) to an adult ward where this is necessary. The two situations where this might happen are, as described above, either a) when the situation is an emergency, e.g. 'overriding' need, or b) where the need is 'atypical'. In whatever circumstances a young person is admitted to an adult ward, measures must be in place to ensure that the young person receives the best care possible in a safe and therapeutic environment.

Government policy is that under 16s should never be admitted to adult wards. Any such admissions are treated as Serious Untoward Incidents.