



Assessment Rooms

One of the difficulties liaison teams face when working in Acute Hospitals is having a dedicated high risk assessment room in which to assess patients.

The standard set out in PLAN is 'Can the liaison team access facilities and equipment for conducting high risk assessments'? PLAN requires the following:

- a) Be located within the main Emergency Department
- b) Have at least one door which opens outwards and is not lockable from the inside
- c) Have an observation panel or window which allows staff from outside the room to check on the patient or staff member. A common and effective approach is to use windows with built in adjustable blinds, which allow partial viewing of the room and the option for staff to view the room fully if a situation requires it, whilst offering a degree of patient privacy. Another approach is to use obscured glass to provide privacy, in which case a small section of this must be clear so that staff can still look in if needed.
- d) Have a panic button or alarm system (unless staff carry alarms at all times)
- e) Only include furniture, fittings and equipment which are unlikely to be used to cause harm or injury to the patient or staff member. For example, sinks, sharp-edged furniture, lightweight chairs, tables, cables, televisions or anything else that could be used to cause harm or as a missile are not permitted.
- f) Not have any ligature points

Note: Whilst not mandatory for accreditation, PLAN highly recommends that assessment facilities should have with two doors to provide additional security. All new assessment rooms must be designed with two doors.

Teams have successfully lobbied for new facilities when a room has been unsuitable. Rooms need to be furnished so that furniture cannot easily be used as a weapon. The seating should be sturdy and comfortable. Ideally the room needs to be big enough to allow four people to sit comfortably in, and when the peer review team visit your hospital and room, they need to agree that the facilities are safe and private too. Because of these requirements some people feel the assessment room can look too stark and unfriendly. Canvas pictures which are secured tightly to the wall are a way of brightening up the room, as is painting the walls.

Points to consider

- Are there any ligature points?
- Can the furniture be easily picked up?
- Are any windows in the room made of toughened glass?
- How big is the observation panel or window? Privacy is also important and frosted film can be purchased cheaply to ensure privacy of patients.
- Is there a strip alarm if staff do not carry personal alarms?
- Can the door open outwards and ideally both ways?
- Are there two doors?
- Are any pictures on the wall made of canvas and securely fastened?
- Is there any other furniture other than seating? If so this needs to be removed.

If your room is unsuitable (for example if it is also used as a medical room and contains a sink, bed etc) PLAN can contact commissioners and managers on a team's behalf to highlight the inadequacy of the room. We will send a letter which emphasises the positive work the team is doing, and we will outline the achievements of the team, and inform the Trust(s) that the standard regarding the assessment room needs to be met to achieve accreditation. PLAN gives teams time to make these changes and offers advice on the recommendations that need to be met. In our experience, this is almost always effective in making the changes happen although it may mean it takes a bit longer for a team to be accredited, it does result in a room that is safer for patients and staff.

On the next pages are some good examples of assessment rooms which meet PLAN standards.

For further advice, please contact the PLAN team.

- Below shows a strip alarm, privacy shutters and anti-ligature handle



- This room has a strip alarm and enough room for four people to sit comfortably. The bright sofas make the room more welcoming.



- Below is an example of how lightweight canvas pictures can add warmth to an assessment room, but they need to be securely attached to the wall.



- This shows a room with two doors which open both ways, and has an observation panel whilst also ensuring privacy. Again, a strip alarm is clearly visible.



- Below demonstrates a room which has frosted, toughened glass for privacy and safety, sturdy furniture and is also a good sized room.



- Another example of sturdy seating

