

JAIL BULLETIN

Number 84

March, 1992

INTAKE AND ADMISSIONS - PART III

VI. HEALTH SCREENING PROCEDURES¹

A basic health screening process is an essential part of the jail admissions process. The values and benefits of conducting a basic health screening of all inmates include defining the health care needs of the incoming inmate and protecting the health and welfare of other inmates and jail staff. Additionally, screening should identify inmates who are taking medication so that they can properly receive it.

Screening is done on a written form. It is filled out by the booking officer or a health care professional as part of the routine booking process. Most screening forms contain two sections: one section in which the screening officer documents information about his visual assessment of the inmate's condition, including answers to such questions as:

- * Are there visible signs of trauma or illness requiring immediate emergency or doctor's care?
- * Does the inmate appear to be under the influence of alcohol?
- * Does the new inmate have obvious pain or bleeding or other symptoms suggesting need for emergency services?
- * Does the inmate's behavior suggest the risk of suicide?

In the second section, the screening officer asks the inmate questions about his health status, asks any appropriate follow-up questions, and documents the answers. Such questions commonly

¹Source of information on follow-up screening: "Basic and Follow-Up Health Screening of Jail Inmates" by Mary Drapkin and Keith Lang, Wisconsin Department of Health and Social Services, 1987.

focus on whether the inmate is taking medication, whether he has recently been hospitalized or seen a doctor, whether he has a chronic disease such as diabetes or hepatitis, and whether he has any other medical problems or conditions about which jail staff should know.

Comprehensive forms and procedures for intake health screening were developed by the American Medical Association (AMA) in the 1970's. The AMA's jail health care program is now under the auspices of the National Commission on Correctional Health Care (NCCHC), based in Chicago.

The basic health screening should be done on **all** newly-admitted inmates. Your jail should have a set of disposition guidelines that direct jail staff to act in response to specific answers to screening questions. For example, if the screening indicates that an inmate has a possible communicable disease, there should be a written procedure that directs the jail officer. Steps the officer might take could include isolating the inmate pending medical evaluation, referring him to the medical staff, or using disposable dinnerware.

If the basic health screening indicates that an inmate has a possible mental health problem, seems to be a suicide risk, or has a potentially-serious alcohol or drug problem, then a follow-up screening should be done on that inmate in order to obtain and document more detailed information about the inmate. Sample forms for doing such screening are included in this chapter of the Manual.

For example, a typical question on the basic health screening form asks: "Does the inmate's behavior suggest the risk of suicide?" In the event of a YES answer to that question, a follow-up screening should be done on a separate screening form. The follow-up screening is designed to obtain and document the following information about the subject of the screening:

- * Whether the inmate presents any verbal or behavioral indicators of suicide risk, or whether there is anything about his current status that indicates potential suicide risk;
- * Inmate's history of mental health problems and any professional mental health treatment or intervention;
- * Whether or not the inmate is currently under treatment, including medication; and
- * Whether the inmate presents any behavioral or verbal indicators of possible mental illness or serious emotional distress for which he ought to be evaluated by a mental health professional.

If the screening indicated that an inmate seemed to be a fairly high suicide risk, then the screening officer's disposition might be to immediately place the inmate on "suicide watch" status and call the jail mental health worker for advice. These actions would be specifically documented.

The advantage of such thorough documentation is that it clearly communicates to all staff actions taken and/or intentions. Additionally, this written evidence that a screening was performed and actions were then taken on the basis of that screening could be important as evidence if litigation results.

Of course, not all potential suicide risks in jails can be identified during intake screening. But some can, and for that reason, it is important to do as thorough a job as possible of getting information during intake.

The other follow-up screening form, Sample H-8, the Alcohol/Drug Abuse Screening Form, would be completed if the basic health screening indicated that an inmate has a potentially-serious alcohol or drug abuse problem. Again, this form provides both a visual assessment and an interview section, and also contains space for the screening officer to note his or her disposition based on the screening.

The forms included in this chapter are samples. They can, of course, be revised for adaption by any jail wishing to use them.

VIII. CLOTHING AND BEDDING ISSUE

The National Sheriffs' Association recommends that jail uniforms be provided for all inmates. They suggest that providing uniforms helps prevent the introduction of contraband into the facility, aids in the control of lice, eliminates the possibility of bartering, stealing, or gambling with clothing, decreases escape risks, and makes it easier to do institutional laundry.

Of course, you will set your own policies about clothing. Many jails do not allow inmates to take their own clothes into the facility. This does result in some extra cost because clothing has to be provided by the facility. Other jails allow certain types of personal clothing to be worn by inmates. For inmates who do not have adequate clothing, or do not choose to wear their own clothes, jail uniforms are provided. There are good arguments on both sides of this question. You will need to establish your own policy about this; follow through with written procedures.

Also, at the time of admission, inmates should be provided with clean bed linens and towels. Be sure that you have adequate supplies on hand.

IX. ORIENTATION TO JAIL RULES

An essential ingredient of the admissions process is to make inmates aware of basic jail rules and regulations which you have developed. It is very important that you have written rules of conduct, and that you specify the types of sanctions which will be imposed if the rules are broken. These must be developed in writing. If you have a large number of inmates who do not speak English, and who share a common language, the rules should be available in their language.

Be sure to give a copy of all rules and regulations to each incoming inmate at the time of admission. Give the inmate time to read the rules. If the inmate has any trouble reading, have a staff member read the rules to him/her. Be sure that the inmate understands the contents of the rules and the possible sanctions that can be imposed for violations. If there are any questions which the inmate has about the facility, answer them completely.

When the staff member is satisfied that the inmate understands the rules, have the inmate sign a receipt stating that he/she has received the rules, has reviewed them, and understands them. Put this receipt in the inmate file folder for future reference.

X. ADMITTING THE INMATE TO CONFINEMENT

After all of the steps of the admission and intake process have been completed, the inmate will be admitted to the jail. Part of the intake and admission process should include procedures for classifying the inmate.

The initial classification decision is an important one. You can use all of the information you have collected during the first stage of intake and admission to help with that decision.

Many jails find it useful to first admit inmates to a section of the jail which is reserved for short-term inmates. This short-term holding area can be used for inmates who are expected to stay only a few hours or a few days, for inmates who need observation and special supervision, or for inmates who are expected to stay longer but who may need time to adjust before being admitted to the general population. The first 24 hours of incarceration is the highest risk period for inmate suicides. This makes close supervision a necessity during this time.

In a small jail, it may be difficult to reserve a special area for short-term holding. Use your imagination and try to find a way of doing this. There are many advantages to separating the short-term from longer-term inmates. There are further advantages to having inmates who are in their first two or three days of confinement housed together where they can be supervised more closely and where staff are better trained to deal with the problems which arise.

XI. SUMMARY

Initial admission and intake into the jail is an important aspect of jail operation. It requires clear policies and procedures, documentation and records, staff training and supervision, and the right facilities.

Be sure that your intake and admission process is a careful, safe, and legal component of your jail operations.

*This Jail Bulletin is a reprint of material
available in the National Institute of
Corrections, Small Jail Resource Manual.
Copies of the manual may be purchased from
CRS Inc., (207) 685-9090.*

QUIZ

Nebraska Jail Standards require that jail staff receive eighteen (18) hours of in-service training each year. The Jail Bulletin may be used to supplement in-service training if an officer studies the Bulletin, completes the quiz and this process is documented by the jail administrator for review during jail inspections.

SUBJECT: INTAKE AND ADMISSIONS, PART III

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NAME _____

DATE _____

1. List the 3 reasons given for conducting health screening for new inmates.
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____

2. All new admissions to jail should receive medical screening, even if they were released from jail within the last few days.
TRUE FALSE

3. It is possible to identify all suicide risks with intake screening forms.
TRUE FALSE

4. Providing jail uniforms for inmates may reduce escape risks.
TRUE FALSE

5. Why is supervision so important during an inmate's first 24 hours of incarceration?

CREDIT: One-half hour credit for Jail Inservice Training requirement.

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1. List the 3 reasons given for conducting health screening for new inmates.
 - a. DEFINING THE HEALTH NEEDS OF INMATES.
 - b. PROTECTING HEALTH NEEDS OF STAFF AND OTHER INMATES.
 - c. IDENTIFY INMATES WHO ARE TAKING MEDICATION.

2. All new admissions to jail should receive medical screening, even if they were released from jail within the last few days.
TRUE FALSE

3. It is possible to identify all suicide risks with intake screening forms.
TRUE FALSE

4. Providing jail uniforms for inmates may reduce escape risks.
TRUE FALSE

5. Why is supervision so important during an inmate's first 24 hours of incarceration?
A HIGH RISK OF SUICIDE EXISTS DURING THIS PERIOD OF TIME.

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