Central Regional Voluntary and Involuntary Commitment

Voluntary Admission

If you think you need to be in the hospital, we strongly recommend that you first visit your Local Management Entity (LME) or local provider for a mental health screening. If your mental health worker agrees with you, he or she will call the hospital's Admitting Office.

When you arrive at the hospital, you will go to the Screening and Admissions Unit where you will be asked to sign a "Voluntary Evaluation/Admission" form. Next, you will be examined by a hospital physician. If the physician agrees that you should be hospitalized, you will be admitted.

If you are over 18 with a court-appointed guardian, you can be admitted on the application of your guardian and with the consent of the hospital admitting physician. You must have a court hearing, however. At the court hearing, which must be held within 10 days of your admission, a judge will decide whether you remain in the hospital.

If you are voluntarily admitted and you think you no longer need treatment, you can ask to be discharged by completing the *Request for Discharge* form. You will be allowed to leave within 3 days (72 hours) unless your doctor feels you need further treatment. If this is the case, the process for involuntary commitment may be started.

Involuntary Commitment

If someone else has decided that you need to be in the hospital, these are the steps that must be followed:

- An affidavit must be filed with the Clerk of Superior Court or Magistrate of District Court. The Clerk or Magistrate may issue an order to a law enforcement officer to take you into custody for examination by a qualified professional.

- If the qualified professional finds that you are mentally ill and dangerous to yourself or others, you will be taken to a hospital.

- Shortly after arrival at the hospital, you will be examined by a hospital physician. If the hospital physician agrees with the first examiner that hospitalization is necessary, you will be admitted for observation and treatment. If the physician does not believe you should be in the hospital, you will be released.

- A court hearing must be held no later than 10 days after you are taken into custody. The hearing can be held either in the county where the commitment was started or at the hospital. Within a few days after you are admitted, a lawyer from the Office of Special Counsel will contact you. He or she will be your lawyer at the initial hearing. You may also hire a lawyer at your own expense. At the hearing, the judge will decide whether you should be treated in the hospital or in the community and discharged. The judge also will decide how many days you may be kept in the hospital before another hearing must be held.

If you wish, you may retain your own lawyer at your expense. At the hearing, you may exercise the following rights**.**

- The right to an attorney. You may have your own, or an attorney can be provided for you. You can reach an attorney by calling 919-764-7110.
- The right to be present at the hearing.
- The right to speak for yourself.
- The right to challenge what is said about you.

If you leave the hospital without authorization, your physician may notify law enforcement agencies and request that you be returned.