

MENTAL HEALTH REVIEW TRIBUNAL FOR WALES

GUIDANCE FOR THE OBSERVATION OF TRIBUNAL HEARINGS

The purpose of this guidance is to set down the terms and conditions for the observation of tribunal hearings, which are usually held in private, and for the appropriate handling of confidential reports and other documentary evidence.

The Mental Health Review Tribunal for Wales Rules 2008

1. Rule 25(1) provides that all hearings must be held in private unless the Tribunal considers that it is in the interests of the patient for the hearing to be held in public. Rule 10(1) also provides that, unless the Tribunal gives a direction to the contrary, information about mental health cases and the names of any persons concerned in such cases must not be made public. Where a hearing, or part of it, is to be held in private, the Tribunal may determine who is permitted to attend the hearing or part of it (Rule 25(3)).

2. Except in relation to member induction, training and appraisals, the strong presumption in all cases is in favour of privacy and confidentiality, and individual tribunals should not exercise powers to hold proceedings in public, or disclose any information about mental health cases to others outside the jurisdiction (including to judges in other jurisdictions), without first consulting the President. Additionally, save as above, the views of the patient and/or the patient's representative must be sought before any disclosure of relevant confidential information takes place, and any objections from the patient and/or the patient's representative must be respected.

Categories of Observers

Member Induction or Training

3. Following appointment as a member of the Tribunal, it is a term and condition of a person's appointment that, unless they have adequate relevant previous experience, they should observe a number of tribunal hearings as part of their induction or training before they are entitled to sit. These observations have to be facilitated and, subject to the hearing chairman and the administrative staff being made aware in advance, the following guidelines apply:-

- 3.1 The presence of the observer at the hearing is not subject to the consent of the patient, witnesses, individual tribunal members, or any other party. However, if the presence of the observer causes a patient to feel particular discomfort or distress, the observer and the hearing chairman (having consulted colleagues) may agree that the observation should not take place, or should be abandoned.
- 3.2 The observer is entitled to receive copies of the reports or other documents before the Tribunal, either in advance of, or at, the hearing, on the strict understanding that the contents must not be made public under any circumstances.
- 3.3 The hearing chairman should agree with the observer how the observer will be introduced to the parties.

- 3.4 The observer should sit where the hearing chairman (having consulted colleagues) feels it is appropriate, and should adopt as passive a role as is possible having regard to the lay-out of the hearing room and the proximity of the parties.
- 3.5 The observer must not intervene in any way during the hearing.
- 3.6 The observer is entitled to make such notes as are appropriate for the purposes of the observation. Such notes must be maintained as strictly confidential and such that the patient cannot be identified and must not be made public under any circumstances.
- 3.7 The observer is entitled to be present during the Tribunal's deliberations, but shall take no part whatsoever in the deliberations.

Appraisers

4. Appraisals must be facilitated and the hearing chairman and the administrative staff must be made aware in advance. In the sense that an appraiser is an observer, the role and functions of an appraiser attending the hearing to appraise one of the members are set out in the Mental Health Review Tribunal for Wales Appraisal Guide. The guidance set out at paragraphs 3.1 to 3.7 above also applies, as appropriate.

Other Persons Seeking to Observe a Tribunal Hearing

5. The categories of persons wishing to observe a tribunal hearing will be limited. Observations will not be agreed as any general part of staff, trainee or student education. Specific training objectives must be identified for any person seeking to observe a hearing. Permission is not likely to be granted unless the end objective is for the observer to be directly involved in tribunal hearings in future. All observation requests not covered by paragraphs 3 and 4 above should in the first instance be made in advance to the President for a preliminary decision. If a representative, hospital staff member or other involved professional appears at a hearing with a student or proposed observer without having sought advance permission, the Tribunal must deal with any application under Rules 10 and 25 on its merits and the principle of future involvement in tribunal hearings will apply. However, in all such cases, it must be recognised that such observers are unlikely to be members of the jurisdiction and, therefore, the rules referred to in paragraph 1, and the guidance in paragraph 2 above, will apply.

6. If asked in advance, the President may indicate that she has no objection to the presence of the particular observer for the reasons given in support of the request, but in any event the patient, witnesses, tribunal members and other parties must be asked for their views before the tribunal hearing the case makes a direction under Rule 25(3) permitting the presence of the observer.

7. In the event that permission for observation is granted, the following guidance shall apply:-

- 7.1 The reports and any other documents before the Tribunal must not be disclosed at any time to the observer.
- 7.2 The hearing chairman shall advise the observer that the proceedings before the Tribunal are confidential and that information about the proceedings and the names of any persons concerned in the proceedings must not, under any circumstances, be made public by the observer.

- 7.3 The hearing chairman should agree with the observer how the observer will be introduced to the parties.
- 7.4 The observer should sit where the hearing chairman (having consulted with colleagues) feels it is appropriate and should adopt as passive a role as possible having regard to the lay-out of the hearing room and the proximity of the parties.
- 7.5 The observer shall not intervene in any way during the hearing.
- 7.6 The observer should not take any notes during the hearing.
- 7.7 The observer is not entitled to be present during the Tribunal's deliberations and should withdraw, along with the parties, from the hearing room at any time when the Tribunal is deliberating.

Carolyn Kirby, OBE
President
Mental Health Review Tribunal for Wales

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