



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
HEADQUARTERS, UNITED STATES ARMY MEDICAL COMMAND
2050 WORTH ROAD
FORT SAM HOUSTON, TX 78234-6000

REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

OTSG/MEDCOM Policy Memo 10-004

MCHO-CL-Q

22 FEB 2010

Expires 22 February 2012

MEMORANDUM FOR Commanders, MEDCOM Regional Medical Commands

SUBJECT: Color-Coded Wristband Standardization for Patient Alerts

1. References:

a. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Patient Safety Authority, Pennsylvania Color of Safety Task Force, http://www.patientsafetyauthority.org/EducationalTools/PatientSafetyTools/wristbands/Documents/wristband_manual.pdf.

b. Arizona Hospital and Healthcare Association, Safe and Sound: An Arizona Patient Safety Initiative, Color-Coded Wristband Standardization in Arizona Toolkit, http://www.azhha.org/patient_safety/wristbandtoolkit.pdf.

c. American Hospital Association, Implementing Standardized Colors for Patient Alert Wristbands, 4 September 2008, <http://www.aha.org/aha/advisory/2008/080904-quality-adv.pdf>.

2. Purpose: To clearly define the process for identifying and communicating patient-specific risk factors, alerts, or special needs by standardizing the implementation of color-coded alert wristbands based on the patient assessment, the patient's wishes, and the patient's medical status.

3. Proponent: The proponent for this policy is the Assistant Chief of Staff for Health Policy and Services, Quality Management Division, Patient Safety Program.

4. Applicability: This policy applies to all parent Army military treatment facilities (MTFs) and their subordinate facilities or outpatient clinics.

5. Background:

a. In 2005, the Pennsylvania Patient Safety Authority received an incident report involving a near-miss in which clinicians nearly failed to resuscitate a patient who was

MCHO-CL-Q

SUBJECT: Color-Coded Wristband Standardization for Patient Alerts

incorrectly designated as a patient with a “Do Not Resuscitate” (DNR) status. A nurse had incorrectly placed a yellow wristband on the patient. In that hospital, the color yellow represented DNR. However, the nurse also worked in another hospital in which the color yellow represented a “restricted extremity” or an extremity that cannot be used for phlebotomy or IV access. Fortunately in this case, another nurse recognized the mistake and the patient was successfully resuscitated.

b. Ineffective communication is a leading factor in the occurrence of sentinel and adverse events in Army MTFs and in medical facilities throughout the Military Health System and civilian sector. The use of color-coded alert wristbands provides an effective communication tool and when implemented in a standardized manner within a medical facility and among medical facilities will reduce medical errors that occur in Army MTFs.

c. On a national level, over 28 States have voluntarily adopted a standardized set of colors that medical facilities must use to convey certain medical alerts or conditions. These States use all or most of the following colors to represent a patient’s medical alert or condition: red (allergies), purple (DNR), yellow (fall risk), green (latex allergy), and pink (restricted extremity). The US Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery has also implemented the standardized use of color-coded alert wristbands for patients at risk for falling, DNR status, and allergies and have aligned the colors used for these specific patient alerts with those used by the States. The American Hospital Association has also endorsed the use of standardized color-coded alert wristbands using the same colors as described in this paragraph.

6. Goals:

a. To reduce confusion associated with the use of color-coded alert wristbands by standardizing the use of colors throughout Army MTFs.

b. To communicate patient safety risks to all healthcare staff in Army MTFs.

c. To include the patient, family members, and significant others in the communication process and color-coded alert wristband program.

7. Policy:

a. This policy memorandum does not mandate the use of color-coded alert wristbands in Army MTFs. Each MTF must make its own determination regarding the use of color-coded alert wristbands in communicating a patient’s medical condition or alert status. If the MTF decides to use color-coded alert wristbands, it must use the colors described in paragraph 7b (10) to convey the appropriate medical condition or alert status. If an MTF decides not to use color-coded alert wristbands, they must adhere to the requirements of paragraphs 7b (5), (6), (7), and (8) of this policy memorandum.

b. Risk reduction strategies include the following:

(1) Color-coded alert wristbands will contain preprinted or embossed text clarifying the intent or message (for example, Allergy, Fall Risk, DNR, Latex Allergy, or Extremity Restriction).

(2) Except in emergency situations, no handwriting will be applied to the color-coded alert wristbands.

(3) Color-coded alert wristbands should only be applied or removed by a nurse or designated personnel, preferably the nurse conducting an assessment, in accordance with MTF policy and procedures.

(4) If labels, stickers, or other visual cues are used to communicate risk factors, medical alerts, or wristband application in the medical record, white board, or door signage, those cues will use the same corresponding color and text as the color-coded alert wristband.

(5) Wearing non-hospital (community or social cause) wristbands is prohibited in the hospital setting. The nurse will remove or cover such wristbands when the patient is admitted to prevent confusion with the color-coded alert wristband. Community or social cause wristbands include charity and fashion bands (e.g., "Live Strong", cancer). See paragraph 9f for additional information regarding patient and/or family member refusal.

(6) Other programs or initiatives related to the use of color-coded alert wristbands (for example, the Braselow color-coded system) are prohibited in Army MTFs.

(7) Wristbands applied by another medical facility will be removed upon admission or transfer into the MTF.

(8) Patient and family education will be conducted on the purpose and meaning of color-coded alert (hospital) wristbands as well as the risks associated with wearing community or social cause bands in the medical facility.

(9) Upon patient assessment, hand-off of care, and facility transfer, educate the staff to verify the purpose and meaning of the color-coded alert wristbands.

(10) If an Army MTF elects to use color-coded alert wristbands, the following are the only color-coded wristbands that will be used:

(a) Clear or white: Used for patient identification. The patient identification and admission wristband may be applied by non-clinical staff in accordance with MTF policy and procedures.

(b) Red: Used to identify patients with allergies (except latex allergies, see (f) Green below). Allergies include those to medication(s), food, environmental allergens, or other substances that may cause an allergic reaction in the patient. The allergies should be written in the patient's medical record in accordance with MTF policy. The red wristband should be applied in accordance with MTF policy and procedures. The word "Allergy" will be embossed/ preprinted on the wristband.

(c) Yellow: Used to identify a patient at risk for falling (Fall Risk). Staff should conduct the Falls Risk Assessment and apply the yellow wristband in accordance with MTF policy and procedures. The words "Fall Risk" will be embossed/preprinted on the wristband.

(d) Purple: Used to identify a patient with a "Do Not Resuscitate" order written/included in the medical record in accordance with MTF policy and procedures. The letters "DNR" will be embossed/preprinted on the wristband.

(e) Pink: Used to identify a patient with a restricted extremity or to indicate the extremity that should not be used for starting an IV or phlebotomy. A pink wristband can be used to indicate any diagnosis that results in a restricted extremity. The pink wristband should be applied in accordance with MTF policy and procedures. The words "Restricted Extremity" will be embossed/preprinted on the wristband.

(f) Green: Used to identify a patient with an allergy to latex. The latex allergy should be noted via an order in the patient's medical record and applied in accordance with MTF policy and procedures. The words "Latex Allergy" will be embossed/ preprinted on the wristband.

8. Responsibilities:

a. MTF Commanders will determine if their respective MTF will use color-coded alert wristbands. If so, the MTF Commander will assign responsibility for oversight and coordination of the wristband implementation as outlined in this policy memorandum. MTF Commanders will also ensure that MTF staff are trained and educated on the use of color-coded alert wristbands and the requirements of this policy memorandum.

b. The MEDCOM Patient Safety Center (PSC) will provide guidance and direction on the implementation of this program. In addition, the MEDCOM PSC will inform MTF Commanders of changes in the program and the addition of other colors and their purpose.

9. Procedures: During the initial assessments, data are collected to evaluate the needs of the patient and analyzed to develop a plan of care unique to the individual.

Reassessment is ongoing and may be triggered by key decision points (e.g., changes in the patient's condition, patient desires, certain interventions) or at intervals specified by the disciplines directly involved in providing patient treatment and/or care. It is during the initial and reassessment procedures that risk factors associated with falls, allergies, DNR status, or restricted extremities are identified or modified. Because this is an interdisciplinary process, it is important to identify who has responsibility for applying and removing color-coded alert wristbands, how this information is documented, and how it is communicated. The following procedures have been established to remove uncertainty in these processes.

a. Placement of color-coded alert wristbands: Except in circumstances involving a restricted extremity, any patient demonstrating risk factors on initial or ongoing assessments will have a color-coded alert wristband placed on the same extremity as the admission ID band.

b. DNR: The determination of a "Do Not Resuscitate" order must be consistent with MTF policy and procedures and must be documented in the patient's medical record prior to the nurse or designated staff placing the DNR wristband on the patient. The color-coded alert wristband serves as an alert and does not take the place of an order.

c. Medical record: It should be documented in the patient's medical record that the color-coded alert wristband was applied in accordance with MTF policy.

d. Retention of the color-coded alert wristband during hospitalization: Upon application of the color-coded alert wristband, the nurse or designated staff will instruct each patient and family member that the wristband will not be removed during the hospitalization or outpatient visit.

e. Color-coded alert wristband removal for treatment: In the event that any color-coded alert wristband has to be removed for treatment of the patient, the nurse will remove the wristband. A new color-coded alert wristband will be made, risks reconfirmed, and the new wristband immediately placed on another extremity by the nurse.

f. Patient refusal: If the patient is capable and refuses to wear the color-coded alert wristband, an explanation of the risks will be provided to the patient/family member(s). The nurse will reinforce that it is their opportunity to participate in efforts to prevent errors, and it is their responsibility as part of the team. The nurse will document in the medical record patient refusals and the explanation provided. The patient will be requested to sign an acknowledgement of refusal by the completion of a release. Enclosure 1 provides a template for MTF use in developing this release form.

MCHO-CL-Q

SUBJECT: Color-Coded Wristband Standardization for Patient Alerts

g. Patient/family involvement and education: Upon admission, the patient and his/her family member(s) will be provided with information on risks associated with wearing community (charity) or social cause bands while hospitalized. During assessment procedures, the nurse educates the patient about the risks while explaining why the community/social cause band should be removed. When a color-coded alert wristband is applied, the patient and family member(s) are educated regarding the wristband message (meaning and purpose). Patients are advised to alert the nurse whenever the color-coded alert wristband is removed and not reapplied or when a new wristband is applied and they have not been given explanation as to the reason. The patient and his/her family member(s) are advised of the patient's opportunity and responsibility to participate in preventing errors by wearing the color-coded alert wristband and communicating with caregivers during removal and/or application. The nurse will periodically reconfirm with the patient and family member(s) the meaning and purpose of the color-coded alert wristbands. Upon discharge, the patient and family member(s) will be instructed to remove the color-coded alert wristband once they arrive at their home or final destination.

h. Hand-off in care: The nurse will reconfirm color-coded alert wristbands with the patient and his/her family member(s)/other caregivers and the patient's chart before invasive procedures, at transfer, and during changes in level of care. Errors will be corrected immediately. Color-coded alert wristbands are not removed at discharge. For home discharges, the patient is advised to remove the color-coded alert wristband at home or at his/her final destination. For discharges to another facility, the color-coded alert wristbands are left intact as a safety alert during transfer and upon admission to the receiving hospital. DNR status and all other risk assessments are determined by individual hospital policy, procedure, and/or physician order written within and acknowledged within that care setting only. The receiving hospital is responsible for reassessment and subsequent band removal/reconfirmation/application.

i. Staff education: Staff education regarding color-coded alert wristbands will occur during the hospital and unit/service level orientation process and reinforced as indicated by MTF leadership. A competency checklist must be completed and placed in the staff's competency file or other related files in accordance with MTF policy. Enclosure 2 provides a template for use by MTFs in developing this checklist.

FOR THE COMMANDER:

2 Encls


HERBERT A. COLEY
Chief of Staff

{Facility Name}
{Form Number}

Patient Refusal to Participate in the Wrist Band Process

<p align="center">Patient Identifier Information</p> <p>Name: _____</p> <p>PID: _____</p> <p>DOB: _____</p> <p align="center">Admitting</p>
--

The above named patient refuses to: (check what applies)

Wear color coded alert wristbands.

The benefits of the use of color coded wristbands have been explained to me by a member of the health care team. I understand the risk and benefits of the use of color coded wristbands, and despite this information, I do not give permission for the use of color coded wristbands in my care.

Remove "Social Cause" colored wristbands (like "Live Strong" and others).

The risks of refusing to remove the "Social Cause" colored wrist bands have been explained to me by a member of the health care team. I understand that by refusing to remove the "Social Cause" wristbands could cause confusion in my care, and despite this information, I do not give permission for the removal of the "Social Cause" colored wrist bands.

Reason provided (if any): _____

Date / Time

Signature / Relationship

Date / Time

Witness Signature / Job Title

U.S. Army Medical Command Patient Safety Center wishes to acknowledge the Pennsylvania Color of Safety Task Force and Arizona Hospital and Healthcare Association which developed the form that is the basis for this document.

Staff Competency Checklist

Purpose: These are the standards of the technical competencies necessary for performance and/or clinical practice.

To meet competency standard the employee must demonstrate proficiency in performing the technical procedures safely as evidenced by department specific criteria.

Methods to Use:

- | | | |
|--|---------------------------|-----------------|
| A. Demonstration | D. Skills Lab | G. Other |
| B. Direct Observation/Checklist | E. Self Study/Test | |
| C. Video / Powerpoint Review | F. Data Management | |

Supervisor's initials signify competency was met

Employee Name _____

Job Title _____

Patient Color-coded Alert Wristband Process	Date	Method Used	Supervisors' Initials	Comments
Color Code – what do the three colors mean?				
Who can apply the wristband to the patient?				
When does the application of the wristband(s) occur?				
Policy on patient's not allowed to wear the "Social Cause" bands				
Patient education and how to communicate (script) the information with patients/families				
Need for Re-Application of Band				
Communication re wristbands during transfers and other reports				
Patient refusal to comply with policy				
Discharge Instructions for home and /or facility transfer				

Signature _____

Initials _____

Signature _____

Initials _____

Employee Signature _____

Date _____

U.S. Army Medical Command Patient Safety Center wishes to acknowledge the Pennsylvania Color of Safety Task Force and Arizona Hospital and Healthcare Association which developed the form that is the basis for this document.