

Grave Disability Observations

Observable considerations for grave disability (GD) due to mental health symptoms (or a co-occurring severe substance use disorder):

- Unable to articulate a plan for food, clothing, shelter
- Irrational beliefs about food that is available or offered (e.g. poisoned)
- Inability to engage in personal hygiene due to mental health symptoms
- Refusal to utilize food, clothing, shelter when offered resources
- Urinating or defecating on oneself
- Impacted speech: tangential, rambling, difficult to understand (e.g. "word salad")
- Violent or threatening statements
- Fluctuation between calm and agitation
- Creating a public disturbance
- Yelling obscenities, screaming
- Paranoid or delusional thought content
- Disorganized thought content
- Catatonic/blank stare
- Hallucinating (talking to, hearing voices, responding to unseen others)

In accordance with SB-43, additional observable factors to consider for GD determinations:

Severe Substance Use

- Overwhelming odor of alcohol or marijuana
- Dilated or constricted pupils/bloodshot or watery eyes
- Eyes wide open or droopy, heavy lidded, nodding off
- Unsteady gait/slurred speech/unable to walk or stand by oneself/fumbles simple tasks
- Scratching, picking or clawing at skin (e.g. noticeable sores on face, hands or arms)
- Unintelligible speech: loud, yelling, slurring words
- Multiple/pattern of contacts for similar presentation (intoxication) in 12-month period

continued on the reverse side

www.jfssd.org/patientadvocacy

The Patient Advocacy Program
is funded by the County of San Diego

Grave Disability Observations

Necessary Medical Care

- Not seeking or obtaining necessary medical care due to substance use or mental health symptoms
- Uncontrollable vomiting
- Diminished responsiveness or loss of consciousness
- Potential loss of limb(s) due to untreated condition
- Uncontrolled bleeding
- Coughing or vomiting blood
- Cold/clammy skin
- Seizure/convulsions
- Complaint of severe pain or severe injury
- Non-healing wound, wound care or potential infection
- Extreme or profuse sweating
- Disclosure of untreated co-morbidities

Personal Safety:

- Not tending to personal safety due to substance use or mental health symptoms
- Wandering, walking or running in and out of traffic
- Unhygienic/uninhabitable conditions at home or other home safety issues such as not attending to appliances (e.g., leaving the stove on) due to intoxication or mental health symptoms
- Inability to care for hygiene and cleanliness which could or has led to illness
- Hoarding to an extreme causing safety concerns or hazardous (dangerous) conditions

This document is intended to provide support and guidance while a community standard is being developed. The law does not provide this level of specificity. These examples may change over time and are not exhaustive or dispositive. An individualized assessment must be completed. Determination for when to call 911 for EMS coordination are unchanged with SB-43 and should never be delayed.

Disclaimer: The information on these pages is provided for general informational purposes only and may not reflect the current law in your jurisdiction. No information contained in this document should be construed as clinical or legal advice from Patient Advocacy or the individual author, nor it is intended to be a substitute for legal counsel on any subject matter.

[Click Here to Learn More](#)

For further training, information, or resources, please call (619) 282-1134 or scan the QR code:



Moving Forward
Together

The Patient Advocacy Program
is funded by the County of San Diego