



CONFIDENTIALITY ← Standard 6.5, Standard 7.1

It is the responsibility of the Healthcare Information Department to provide for the maintenance, storage, retrieval, and distribution of healthcare information records. Other employees who are authorized to have access to a healthcare information record should follow standard operating procedures as outlined in the procedures manual. An employee authorization list is located in Healthcare Information Department with the supervisor.

All protected health information is confidential (except as designated by statute or regulations). Employees at orientation and annual evaluations should sign a confidentiality statement (see Privacy Guidelines)

All patient information should be returned to the Healthcare Information Department at the end of the day.

No medical information is to be released to any outside source without proper written authorization. Such transactions should be handled following established operating procedures.

I. INTENT:

Preserving the confidentiality of patient information is a basic tenet of Yakima Neighborhood Health Services (YNHS), as well as a requirement by law. Patients must be able to rely on the confidentiality of provider-patient communications, test results, medical histories, etc. Violation of patient confidentiality may be grounds for disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal from Yakima Neighborhood Health Services.

II. GUIDELINES:

YNHS guidelines regarding patient confidentiality apply to all staff members in all areas of the organization. These procedures also apply to information obtained for YNHS housing residents and clients served by HOPWA and HOPWA Reach. For specific information concerning patient's records, the Healthcare Information Records Manual should be consulted.

A. CONFIDENTIALITY OF PATIENT INFORMATION

Patient information, whether in the form of the documentary medical/dental record, electronic (computerized) data, or as information known to a staff member, is strictly confidential and may be disclosed only to those who are responsible for the patients' care or who have a legitimate interest in the patient's medical history. Yakima Neighborhood Health Services' healthcare providers and other staff shall have access to patient information on a need-to-know basis, and clinicians may abstract patient information for consultants to whom they refer patients. Other healthcare providers outside of Yakima Neighborhood Health Services shall have access to patient information upon receipt of a properly executed written authorization by the patient or legal representative. Procedures for responding to other types of requests for information are stated in the Healthcare information Records Manual.



Confidentiality also applies to medical/dental information about fellow employees at Yakima Neighborhood Health Services that a staff member learns during the course of his or her employment. Such information is to be protected just as strictly as is other patient information.

The documents that constitute a patient's healthcare information record are the property of Yakima Neighborhood Health Services. The original documents may not be removed from the clinic except in accordance with a specific written authorization from the Administration (i.e. Kid Screens, Home Visiting staff), or in the case of legal process a subpoena or court order, and then only if a copy of the healthcare information record will not be sufficient.

B. CONFIDENTIALITY OF NON-MEDICAL INFORMATION

Personnel, payroll, billing, insurance, and demographic information including address and date of birth are also considered to be confidential and are covered by this procedure. Employees must provide written consent for information regarding verification of employment, etc. to be released.

C. CONFIDENTIALITY OF PATIENT RELATED DISCUSSIONS

The need to protect the privacy of a patient's medical/dental information also applies to office discussions. It is easy for people to overhear conversations in public areas. Even a seemingly harmless remark overheard by another person can be embarrassing or damaging to a patient. Yakima Neighborhood Health Services staff should take care to conduct such discussion only where they cannot be overheard.

D. RELEASE OF INFORMATION

All requests for release of patient information including requests for copies of a patient's healthcare information record are to be referred to the Healthcare Information Records Department. Requests for patient information at the Sunnyside satellite clinic shall be processed by the staff at that clinic, following guidelines stated in the Healthcare Information manual. Client information is never to be on the Internet.

A general authorization for the release of medical or non-medical information is NOT sufficient for release of sensitive information. This includes information regarding mental illness, drug addiction, alcoholism, STD, or HIV tests. For more information about the release of sensitive information, consult the Healthcare Information Records Department.

E. COMPUTER SYSTEM SECURITY

Users logged into computers or terminals shall not leave them unattended without minimizing the system or invoking password-protected security features nor shall users allow others to access or edit information under the users' passwords. Passwords shall not be shared. If at any time a staff member suspects that his/her password is known by another person, (s) he must contact the Network Supervisor to cancel the



compromised password and obtain a new one. All passwords shall be changed during employee's anniversary month.

F. LONG DISTANCE PHONE CODE SECURITY

Long distance phone codes are distributed on a need to have basis by administration. Long distance calls are not to be shared, if at any time staff member suspects that another person knows his/her code, (s)he must contact his/her immediate supervisor to cancel the compromised code and obtain a new one.

G. FACSIMILE (FAX) TRANSMISSION OF CONFIDENTIAL MATERIAL

Facsimile transmission (faxing) of confidential patient information is a standard method of communicating healthcare information. Authorized staff who transmit via fax shall be responsible for ascertaining, to the best of their ability, that the receiving machine is in a secure location and that the confidentiality of the material can be preserved.

Incidents of Healthcare Information Records that have been faxed to a wrong receiver (error) should be reported on an YNHS Incident Reporting form and processed per protocol.

H. PENALTY FOR RELEASE OF CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION WITHOUT AUTHORIZATION

A staff member of YNHS may be disciplined, and may in appropriate cases be discharged for the release of confidential patient information to an unauthorized person or organization.

I. PENALTY FOR UNAUTHORIZED RETRIEVAL OF INFORMATION

A staff member of YNHS may be disciplined, and may in appropriate cases be discharged for unauthorized or unnecessary retrieval of confidential patient information regardless of whether disclosure is made to others. Access to patient information may be made only on a need-to-know basis, in order to conduct authorized YNHS business.

J. CONFIDENTIALITY COMMITMENT

At each YNHS employee evaluation the confidentiality statement should be reviewed and re-committed to.

K. PROGRAM SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR CONFIDENTIALITY

In cases where programs require, or patients request, client records to be free of identifying names, YNHS staff should use electronic generated medical record number as client identifiers. Only authorized staff should have access to the medical record system, allowing access to identifiable information linking the record number to the individual client.