
Maintaining

PATIENT CONFIDENTIALITY CHECKLIST

A comprehensive checklist about the different layers of patient confidentiality and the psychology behind these six main points.



Your Checklist for Maintaining Patient Confidentiality



Steer Clear of Earshot

One way to protect confidentiality is to prevent people from listening to conversations. Nurses might not realize someone is eavesdropping or overheard a discussion that included protected health information (PHI). HIPAA doesn't require structural changes to rooms to keep others from overhearing information. But it still helps protect confidentiality if you do everything you can to prevent it from happening in the first place.

Keep Information Out of Eyesight

While the hospital doesn't need to make changes for preventing people from hearing PHI, it does need to ensure that not just anyone can see it. It could be forgetting it in a room, leaving it on a desk where anyone could see, or accidentally dropping it. These mistakes lead to more likely scenarios for a breach. Paper medical records are more likely to cause a data leak than electronic medical records, as only 7 out of 479 breaches were due to EMRs.

Whatever You Do, Don't Gossip

Everyone in a conversation needs the authorization to know the PHI, and there are reasonable precautions to take when sharing. It must also be relevant for them to know. Gossiping about patients and their data is intentional misuse. It serves no purpose for the person's treatment. These are also conversations that if someone overheard, it would still hurt the hospital. It creates a negative reputation if the staff is gossiping about a patient.

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Know Who You're Talking To

The HIPAA Privacy Rule permits health workers to disclose PHI with relevant people in certain situations. If patients are available to give disclosure and have the capacity to make health decisions, they can agree or object to who can know their PHI. The best way to maintain this confidentiality is to have the patient identify the individuals with permission to know PHI. If that's not possible, a guardian or designated caregiver can point out those people.

Pay Attention in Training

The easiest way to ensure privacy is by paying attention in training. There is a good reason why you sit through those lengthy HIPAA training sessions each year. Some people just view this as another task to check off their list. But it's more than a tedious activity. This training goes into depth about what's permissible in and out of the workplace. It expands on each of these topics I already went over, and the legal ramifications of not adhering to confidentiality.

Don't Treat Conflicts of Interest

Treating someone you know has many challenges since it compromises objectivity. It can make the patient feel awkward and vulnerable, or you may feel like you need to give them special treatment. There's also a stronger emotional pressure if something were to go wrong. But another major challenge is confidentiality. Since you know the patient, it's difficult to identify where your personal relationship ends and your work regulations start. There's a chance you'll have the urge to discuss their condition with them outside of the health setting. Or maybe you want to talk about it with another mutual family member or friend.



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