

# CONFIDENTIALITY... IS YOUR BUSINESS!

An essential part of Western Missouri Medical Center's values is honoring the dignity of every individual, whether patient, visitor or employee, and ensuring their right to privacy. Every healthcare worker is charged with handling patient confidentiality issues appropriately. People trust us with their most private information and trust us to keep that information private.

**Patient confidentiality means that we keep all information about patient's healthcare private, indefinitely.**

**WHEN WE PERFORM OUR JOBS WE NEED TO INSURE THAT WE DO NOT BETRAY THAT TRUST AND BREACH CONFIDENTIALITY.**

## **Breach of Confidentiality**

This occurs when private and protected information is improperly given out, either intentionally or unintentionally. Breach of confidentiality is a serious matter because it can emotionally damage the client as well as members of the family. It can make them feel a lack of confidence in the providers as well as in the institution providing the care. Patients may not share important health information if they are afraid it will not be kept private.



## **Confidential Information**

Information known or contained in a patient's medical record, or a person known to the job shadow/observer, shall be treated as confidential and their personal information will not be released by any working or observing, under any circumstances. This includes a wide variety of information about a patient's care.

Examples consist of:

- Details about illnesses or conditions.
- Medical tests results.
- Information about treatments or response to treatments.
- Prognosis.
- Communication between the patient, family, physicians, and friends.

**Basically, if you aren't sure whether you should talk about the information or not, DON'T.**



## **How Does a Breach Occur?**

- Rumors/Gossip.
- Talking in public areas.
- Unauthorized disclosure.
- Failure to secure recorded or computerized information.
- Not paying attention or thinking about what you're doing.

## **Who is Authorized to See Confidential Information?**

- Staff with "The Need to Know"

No patient consent is required to share information with people who need it for the patient's care, quality assessment, billing or maintaining and distributing records. However, this information is only on a "need to know" basis.

- **The Patient**

Information in a patient's record belongs to the patient. A healthcare provider can deny a patient their record only if releasing it would injure the patient.

- **Others**

Some people such as insurance provider, courts, law enforcement officials, attorneys, and other government agencies may have access to patient information if certain criteria are met.



### **Who Should Not See Confidential Information?**

- **Staff Who Don't Have "The Need to Know"**

Staff do not have an automatic right to see or hear confidential patient information. To see a patient's information, an employee must need it to provide care or perform their job.

- **Unauthorized Friends and Family**

Friends and family do not have an automatic right to an adult patient's confidential information. Be sure you have written approval from the patient before you give information to anyone—even loved ones or close friends.

### **Protecting Patient Confidentiality**

Information exists in all forms within an institution. Data can be distributed by way of written medical or business records, faxes, computers and other storage media such as microfilm. We need to look at how we do our job and our routines, our recordkeeping procedures and our interactions with others, in order to minimize accidental disclosure of confidential information.

### **Verbal Communications**

**Do not talk** about patients in any public place to your friends or any family members. Do not discuss confidential information where others (including other patients, visitors and/or staff) might overhear. Personal opinions as to the competence of hospital staff or medical staff members are not to be expressed to anyone, including family members.

### **To Conclude**

Confidentiality is the basis of our patient relationship. Maintaining it really boils down to one thing ~ handling patient information responsibly. All individuals observing at WMMC and having access to any patient, staff member or physician **MUST HOLD** all information in strict confidence, thus abide by the **Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)** regulations.

**If we treat information as if it were our own,  
we will guarantee that it is handled in a manner consistent  
with the values and standards set by Western Missouri Medical Center.**

*(Adapted and used with approval from St. John's Hospital – Lebanon, MO)*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date