

Patients' Guide to Confidentiality of Information

Confidentiality at the Surgery

1. We want you to feel comfortable in discussing issues relating to your health with any health care professional within the practice and we therefore enforce a strict duty of confidentiality.

Young People

2. Confidentiality is just as important for young people. If a child over the age of 14 is considered fully competent to understand and make informed consent regarding their own health problems, information about that child's medical health or history may not be released to parent, guardian or teacher without the child's consent. Over 16s are responsible for their own lives.

Members of your family

3. If you are unwell, your partner, family or carer will be worried about you. However, your doctor cannot divulge information to them without your written consent.

4. Occasionally you may be concerned about a relative who is unwilling to discuss their symptoms with their doctor. In these circumstances you can write to the doctor or make an appointment but the doctor will not be able to provide you with any information relating to the patient.

Practice Staff

5. Practice staff, for example receptionists, are never told of your confidential consultations. However, they do have access to your records in order to type letters, file and scan incoming hospital letters and for a number of other administrative duties. They are not allowed to access your notes for any other purpose. They are also not allowed to discuss any information relating to patients outside work. To do so would be a dismissible offence.

6. The receptionists may ask questions when you make an appointment. You do not have to supply any medical details if you do not wish to, but it will help the receptionists ensure that you get an appointment of the appropriate length with the appropriate person.

Guidelines for confidentiality of information

7. As a patient it is your right, with certain exceptions, to have all information regarding your personal health, whether on paper or on the computer, kept confidential. All staff at the practice are required to sign a statement of confidentiality to ensure that the highest possible standards of confidentiality are maintained.

8. When you first register with a practice certain personal details, such as name, address and date of birth are passed to the Health Authority and to the NHS Central Register. This enables your medical record to be located and passed to your new practice. The Health Authority database holds information on childhood vaccinations and immunisations and cervical cytology. At the moment, no other clinical information is held either by the Health Authority or on the NHS Central Register, although this is likely to change in future (see paragraph 11).

9. At times, it may be necessary to share some information regarding your medical history with other health care professionals such as hospital consultants, to ensure you receive appropriate treatment. In addition there are certain statutory requirements that require a practice to pass on information to the authorities, for example notifications of birth or death, infectious diseases, and gunshot wounds.

10. In other cases where medical information is requested, such as releasing medical records to solicitors, private medical insurers or local authorities, information is only released with the patient's written authority to do so.

11. The NHS Connecting for Health programme is introducing a central information system for all medical records of patients, this is commonly known as 'the NHS National Spine'. Eventually, the intention is for all records to be accessible to health care professionals anywhere in the country via the NHS Spine. If you do not wish to have your records made available in this way, you are able to opt out of this system which would mean that only the minimum of personal information is held on the Spine as per paragraph 8 above. Any request to opt out of the NHS Spine must be made in writing to the Practice Manager.

Research

12. The Practice also participates from time to time in clinical research. The Practice only does so where the research topic is considered to be important and provides benefits to society in general and protects or improves public health.

13. Any research undertaken within the practice is done so in accordance with the Data Protection Act. If information is provided externally to research groups it is in an anonymised form.

14. If patients do not wish their information to be included for research purposes, they should inform their doctor or the Practice Manager.

Access to your own medical records

15. You have a right to access to your health records in accordance with the Data Protection Act. Should you wish to access your medical record please contact the Practice Manager.

16. If you have any concerns regarding the confidentiality of your personal medical history, or you would like further information please do not hesitate to discuss this with your doctor, or the Practice Manager.