

ST. ANTHONY REGIONAL HOSPITAL CONFIDENTIALITY OF PATIENT INFORMATION – A RESOURCE FOR STUDENTS

The confidentiality of patient information is protected under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA, a federal law that can impose severe penalties upon the healthcare organization for violations. Everyone who has access to any patient information must understand the importance of maintaining patient confidentiality.

What is private information?

Protected health information (PHI) is any information linking a person with a disease, illness or condition. Staff members can share PHI without specific authorization signed by the patient for the following purposes only:

1. **Treatment** of the patient
2. **Payment** activities, or healthcare
3. **Operations**

It does not matter whether you heard information, saw a paper with information, saw something on a computer, or observed something directly about a patient: you **may not** share the information with anyone other than staff who are providing the patient's care. The patient also has the right to request to not have a student involved in their care.

Examples:

Can I tell my parents, teachers or friends about what I got to do while at the hospital or clinic?

You may tell people about the tasks you were able to do, or what procedures you saw, but not who was involved. For example, "I watched the doctor give a Cortisone injection," would be permitted; "The doctor gave Jane Doe a Cortisone shot in her knee," is not permissible.

What if someone I know is a patient and I see them while I'm job shadowing in the hospital or clinic?

Patients have a right to choose not to let anyone even know that they are a patient at the hospital. You should not tell anyone that you saw a patient here unless the patient directs you to do so, and the staff person you are working with says it is OK. In either case you should not discuss a patient's diagnosis.

Will I be allowed to take notes while I'm job shadowing in the hospital or clinic?

Any information that you take with you from the hospital or clinics must not have any patient identifiers on it. This includes not only the name of the patient, but also their account number, social security number, date of birth, address or telephone number. You may take notes about what you were able to do or see, but not about which patient(s) were involved.

What happens if I say something that I'm not supposed to?

Under the law, if confidentiality is not maintained, the penalties can be very severe. The patient can file a lawsuit, stating that their rights were violated, and the government could impose monetary fines and even jail time if it is determined that the violation was intentional and for some personal gain. If you realize you have breached a patient's health information, please inform your staff partner who will facilitate contact with the Vice President of Quality. Her role is to mitigate any harm that may result from this information being released and determine a plan of action to protect you and the patient from further injury related to the disclosure of this information.

If you have any questions, please ask! We want you to have the best possible experience, while protecting the rights of the patients and families we serve.

For more information, contact:

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