



HIPAA Orientation

Confidentiality and Privacy mean that the patients have the right to control who will see their protected health information. With the enactment of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA), a patient's right to have his/her health information kept private, secure and confidential became more than just an ethical obligation of healthcare providers; it became a federal law.

Protected Health Information (PHI) includes patient identity, address, age, social security number and any other personal information that patients are asked to provide. In addition, protected health information includes why a person is sick or in the Hospital, what treatments and medications he/she may receive, and other observations about his/her condition or past health conditions.

Healthcare providers use information about patients to determine what services they should receive. Ask yourself before looking at any protected health information:

- Do I need this in order to perform my duties and provide quality care?
- What is the least amount of information I need to perform my duties?

Depending on your task, if you do not need to know confidential patient information, then you should not have access to it.

Ways to protect a patient's privacy include:

- Keep discussions about patient care private if reasonably possible by closing doors, pulling curtains and conducting discussions so that others cannot overhear.
- Keep medical records locked and out of public areas.
- If you find that you are overhearing someone else discuss patient information, let them know they can be overheard and politely remind the individual of the Hospital's privacy policies.
- Do not release any patient information, unless your supervisor has obtained a written authorization from the patient.
- Do not leave messages on answering machines regarding a patient's condition or test results.
- If you should need to copy medical records ensure that you redact the patient's personal identifiers (i.e. name, date of birth, address, medical record number, insurance information and social security number, if captured) prior to taking the record out of the hospital. Return all copies to the hospital and shred.