



RISK NOTE

SUBJECT: Telephone Requests for Patient Information

We recommend facilities review their current practice in dealing with telephone requests for patient information and develop a clear policy for staff. Health care information cannot be disclosed without a patient's consent, and revealing the location and health status of a patient to callers may infringe on privacy rights. A suggested risk management approach to this issue is as follows:

1. Routine Admissions - All individuals are told upon admission that unless otherwise directed, hospital staff will not provide patient name and location information to callers. If patient consent to release information is obtained then the patient's name and location can be released to callers/visitors. If a visitor arrives and requests location information for a patient who has indicated a preference for confidentiality, some sort of verification mechanism to contact the patient regarding the visitor may also have to be put in place.
2. For admission through emergency: if the patient is not capable of giving consent, callers should not be told of location information unless there is an urgent and/or good reason (e.g. relatives seeking child's location after a car accident, etc.). Under *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* healthcare information can be disclosed without consent if it is in order to contact next of kin.

Some discretion and judgment will need to be applied by staff receiving these types of calls regarding their authenticity and appropriate disclosure in the circumstances.

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