



## The Role of Health Information Managers in Ensuring Confidentiality of Patient Health Records and Protection of Patient Rights

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### ABSTRACT

Health workers have the ethical and legal responsibilities to maintain the confidentiality of patient (client) health information obtained while providing care. One way that health information managers maintain boundaries and built client relationship based in trust is by respecting client's right around confidentiality. Confidentiality is the right of an individual of to have personal identifiable medical information kept private-unless consent to release such information is provided by the very patient. In the light of the above, this seminar paper optically critically examined and assessed the level of knowledge of confidentiality of health records staff on patient health records, used the practice of health roc personnel on the confidentiality of patient records and as well assessed the knowledge to record personnel towards protecting patient right.

### ARTICLE INFO

Article History

Received: March 2023

Received in revised form: April, 2023

Accepted: April, 2023

Published online: June, 2023

### KEYWORDS

Health Information, Confidentiality, Patient, Health records, Patient rights

### INTRODUCTION

Health Information Managers (HIMs) play a pivotal role in healthcare systems by managing, organizing, and safeguarding patient health records. Ensuring the confidentiality of these records and protecting patients' rights are paramount to maintaining trust and ethical standards within the healthcare sector.

"Confidentiality is the right of an individual to have personal identifiable medical information kept private. Confidentiality is one of the core duties of medical practice. It requires healthcare providers to keep patient information private unless consent to release the information is provided by the patient "(Bord et al 2013), such information should be made available only to the physician handling stolen necessary. Patient confidentiality mean the personal and medical information (Health Information) given to a health care provider should not be disclosed to others (3rd party) for such release.

The legal duty of confidentiality to health care practitioners is to protect their patient's against inappropriate and unauthorized disclosure of personal health information. The personal health information protection act (PHIPA) which is act (HIPA)

sees constant rules for the management of personnel health information, and outlines the client's right regarding his/her personal health information. The HIPA as PHIPA was also established where legislations. The HIPA as right to privacy with the need of individuals and client's providing health care to access and share health information PHIPA permit the shearing of personal health information among health care team members to facilitate efficient and effective care. The health care team include, all those proving care to the clients, regardless of whether they are employed by the same organization. PHIPA requires that personal health information be kept confidential and secured.

Patients have rights and even responsibilities as well by patient rights, one is referring to those basic rules, of conduct between patients and medical care givers as well are the institutions and people that support them. Patients as it is known is anyone low has requested to be evaluated by or who is being evaluated by any health care professional (Medicine Heath 2015). Patient right was furnished in 1948 through the university declaration of Human rights, which requires the inherent definite and the equal and unalienable rights of human faming. It is on the basis of this

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concept of the person, and the fundamental dignity and equality of all human beings, that the notion of patient rights was developed.

According to the Cleveland Clinic Foundation (2011), rights of a patient can be categorized as right to pensioning privacy and visitation, secondly, cultural and spiritual values, and access to cater, access to information, communication, pain management etc. A person has the right to the confidentiality of his/her identifiable health information; he equally have the right to be informed and involved in decision that affect his/her health status; he/she has the right to provide prior consent before the making of recordings, films or other images that may be used extremely. Every patient has the right to requires a listing of disclosures about his/her heath care, and to be able to access and request to amend his/her medical record as allowed by law; and to know the relationship(s) of the hospital to other persons or organization participating in the provision of one care.

The health information management department s scheduled with the responsibility of being the custodian of identifiable health data, and therefore must be local informed about what the patient rights are, and while the rights have to be protected in a bid to ensure that the standard ethnic of confidentiality of the patients is assigned. The unethical or unlawful discussion of personal information will be a travesty of the order of ethnics as regarding right, of patients, and this coved cause professional or personal problems, and create and issue of mistrust of health workers which could hinder of data supplied to the attending health personnel as the patients expect that their medical information be made private. It is rare for medical records to remain competency sealed; however there should be no room for a breach of confidentiality (The health insurance portability and Accountability Act 2014).

#### **Statement of Problem**

The increasing digitization of health records, coupled with the growing threats to data security, poses significant challenges in maintaining patient health record confidentiality. Additionally, the evolving legal and ethical landscape necessitates a thorough examination of the role of HIMs in safeguarding

patient rights amidst technological advancements.

#### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To analyze the role of HIMs in preserving patient health record confidentiality.
2. To assess the responsibilities of HIMs in protecting patient rights within the healthcare system.
3. To identify the challenges faced by HIMs in ensuring confidentiality and patient rights.
4. To propose recommendations for enhancing the role of HIMs in patient health record confidentiality and protection of patient rights.

#### **Research Question**

1. How do Health Information Managers contribute to maintaining patient health record confidentiality and protecting patient rights in the healthcare environment?

#### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature review will encompass existing theories and practices concerning the role of Health Information Managers in ensuring patient health record confidentiality and protection of patient rights. It will encompass studies related to healthcare data management, legal frameworks, ethics, and technological advancements impacting the field.

Confidentiality as defined by Churchill's Medical Dictionary is the right of a subject to control the disposition of information disclosed during the course of professional relationship and the reciprocal obligation of the professional to ensure that no harm will befall the subject as a result of disclosure of such information. Confidentiality is one of the core duties of medical practice. It requires health care providers to keep a patient's personal health information private unless consent to release the information is provided by the patient. (Board, Burke & 2013). Therefore release or disclosure of the information contained in a health/medical records is done only after authorization is provided, and then only with authorized individuals. The health

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information management department maintains and safeguards the confidentiality of medical record information in accordance with the patient's right to privacy and legal requirement governing such. The medical record and its contents are the property of the Health care provider, however, patients and their legal representative are entitled to inspect or obtain copies of the information contained within it. (UConnHealth, 2015)

Confidentiality is an ethical duty. It is what is required of every health worker involve in the care of the patient. Most confidentiality agreements, either written or implied (as with the attorney-client privilege, for example), remain in effect indefinitely. The doctor-patient relationship establishes an implied contract of confidentiality, since the doctor is in a position to help the patient by collecting and analyzing otherwise private information. If the doctor asks a pharmacist to fill a prescription for a drug known to treat a serious form of cancer, for example it would not be breach of confidentiality.

But if the doctor were to tell for example a patient's employee that the patient is terminally ill, that most certainly would constitute a breach of their ethical duty to keep your information private. Confidential information is regularly handled by financial institutions; hospital; doctors; therapists, law firms; business; religious authorities; and others. The conditions under which the obligation may or must be breached are usually determined by laws which they vary from one jurisdiction to another enables the doctor to diagnose conditions properly and to treat the appropriately. In essence, the protection of confidential information is essential to the rising relationship between health care providers and patients. Some sensitive financial information which patients usually want to protect include condition such as excusive abuse, sexually transmitted disease (STD), domestic violence, birth control, abortion, infertility, eating disorder, bulimia, anorexia, HIV/AIDS, abnormal abuse, rehabilitation, mental health, psychiatry, genetic testing etc. it has been disclosed that many who withheld their diagnosis from doctors did so because they are have trust the medical practitioner to be able to keep the

information confidential, or using feared refusal of treatment of discrimination from the medical practitioner. The medical doctor should therefore not disclose confidential communication or information without the patient's express consent unless required to disclose the information by law or where a patient threatens bodily harm to him or herself or to another person (UConnhealth, 2015).

#### **Research Instrument and Method of Data**

**Analysis:** The primary research instrument involved surveys and interviews with Health Information Managers and other stakeholders involved in health data management. The gathered data was analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively, using appropriate analytical tools to draw meaningful conclusions.

#### **DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

The collected data was analyzed, focusing on the responses from Health Information Managers regarding their roles and challenges in maintaining patient health record confidentiality and upholding patient rights. The discussion revolved around the findings, drawing comparisons with existing literature and identified potential strategies for improvement.

#### **QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSE RATES**

A total of 105 questionnaires were returned out of 150 distributed, giving an overall response rate of 70%.

#### **BASIC DEMOGRAPHY**

The doctors represented 33.3% of all participants; followed by health information management professionals (26%), Nursing (19.3%) and 21.4 others (see Table 1 below). The proportion is similar to the population of the various professional groups in the hospital as at the time of the study.

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**Table 1:** Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

	Indicators	N	%
1	<b>Profession</b>		
	Administration	21	14
	Health information Management	40	26
	Medicine (all doctors)	50	33.3
	Medical Laboratory Science	10	6.6
	Nursing	29	19.3
2	<b>Years in practise</b>		
	<= 5 years	75	50
	>6-10 years	24	16
	>11-15 years	18	12
	>16-20 years	9	6
	>20 years	18	12
	Not indicated	6	4

## DISCUSSION

Health professionals are considerably aware of confidentiality of patients' health records right from their respective training schools and are positively disposed to its relevance and importance to sound health care delivery. These findings agree with the study reported by Garb in CAS et al that most interviewees affirmed to have awareness of the ethical aspects of their professions related to confidentiality. However, it is contrary to the findings reported from Barbados that majority of participants acquired their knowledge of confidentiality and ethics during work and that many of them are either unaware of the importance of confidentiality or are unable to appropriately deal with related issues. School as the major source of knowledge of confidentiality from our findings might imply that curricula in relevant medical and paramedical training schools contain certain instructions on ethical and legal obligations of Health care professionals especially on confidentiality. The fact that health information management professionals had the highest percentage of school as their source of information on confidentiality might possibly corroborate the tenet that maintaining confidentiality is one of their major roles in health care services. Also, the few participants who had multiple sources of information on confidentiality were doctors and nurses. This might be due to their weekly exposure to various hospital-based continuous medical education (CME) and continuous professional development (CPD) activities. These many

times serve as avenue for dissemination of knowledge on various aspects of professional practice. The level of awareness among these professionals tends to be beneficial to the patients and health care systems in general. Since medical confidentiality provides an essential element of the trust needed to build a successful doctor-patient relationship.

Therefore, their level of knowledge determines how much of this rule they know and their ability to put it into practice.

In spite of their level of awareness of confidentiality, professionals in this study have demonstrable gaps in knowledge of this important aspect of health care. Only a few of them agreed that confidentiality is the responsibility of all health care providers while the relative majority opined that it is the sole responsibility of health information management professionals. This last view attests to the obvious existing gap between their knowledge and practice. Although this finding goes with the one reported by Shrier et al that most professionals do not fully understand their obligations towards patients' records confidentiality: it disagrees with all existing laws on confidentiality which state that all health care managers and professionals shall maintain confidentiality of patients' health records.

**Research Findings using Health Information Personnel's:** The research findings underscored the critical role of HIMs in safeguarding patient health record confidentiality and protecting patient rights. It presented insights from Health Information

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Managers regarding their experiences, challenges, and recommendations to enhance data confidentiality and patient rights protection.

### CONCLUSION

Health Information Managers play a vital role in ensuring patient health record confidentiality and safeguarding patient rights within healthcare systems. By understanding their responsibilities and addressing the challenges they face, healthcare organizations can strengthen data privacy and uphold ethical standards, ultimately benefiting patient care and trust.

### RECOMMENDATION

Based on the research findings, it is recommended that

1. Healthcare organizations provide adequate training and resources to HIMs,
2. Integrate advanced technologies for secure data management,
3. Emphasize adherence to legal and ethical guidelines.
4. Collaboration and knowledge sharing among HIMs and
5. Other healthcare professionals should be encouraged to foster a culture of data privacy and patient rights protection.

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