Assuring Patient Confidentiality and Privacy at the NIH Clinical Center

Respect and Maintain Privacy

- Treat patient information as if it were your own; keep it private.
- Protect documents that identify CC patients and their diagnoses from unauthorized access.
- Keep conversations about patients private. Be particularly careful in public areas, including cafeterias, elevators and hallways, or any other areas where you may be overheard.
- Post clinic or conference schedules out of public view.
- Keep confidential personally identifiable health information documents in locked, secure areas.
- Protect resources provided by the CRIS system or other patient databases. Dispose of printouts properly. Protect sign-on codes. Remember to sign-off. Stay alert for unauthorized or unknown people near CRIS terminals and printers.
- Request only information you need from CRIS - do not browse.
- Remember to remove all patient-related materials after a conference or meeting. Conference materials should only include the minimal amount of PII necessary to accomplish the clinical, educational or research purposes. If outside guests are in attendance, contact HIMD to obtain a non-disclosure agreement for guest to read and sign prior to the meeting.
- Keep sensitive research or clinical material out of public areas.
- When you see confidential medical record materials unattended in a public area, return them to the Health Information Management Department.
- Make sure that fax machines, pneumatic tubes, copiers and printers are located in a secure area.
- Monitor who uses photocopy machines and what they are used for.
- When paging patients, request call back. Do not page patients to a specific diagnostic or treatment location in the hospital.

Release of Patient Information

- Only the following information may be released without prior written authorization from the patient: a) verification of an individual as a current inpatient; b) general condition of the patient (e.g. good, fair, stable, serious, or critical) with permission of the patient's attending physician.
- Do not copy or release information from patient charts without a written, signed request of the patient. All outside requests for patient information should be processed through the Health Information Management Department.
- In emergent situations where the continued health of a patient is at issue, medical record information may be released without prior consent. The release may be via several forms including telephone or facsimile. Such requests should be referred to the Health Information Management Department whenever possible. However, in cases where referral is not possible, the information requested is to be released as quickly as possible. Subsequently, the circumstances of the release must be documented in the patient's record and the Health Information Management Department notified of the release.
- Do not transmit medical record information by voice mail, e-mail or cell phone except in a medical emergency when patient care could be jeopardized if the information were not immediately available. The information transmitted should be limited to that required to resolve the emergency and should not be transmitted without patient authorization except when consent is not possible. If transmitting medical record information by email, encryption is necessary.
- Always keep in mind that what you write may be read by others including representatives of insurance companies, attorneys, accrediting groups, and staff from other Federal agencies.
- Obtain permission before identifying a CC patient as an individual in any communication outside NIH.

Disposal of Sensitive Information

- When you make a copy, use it and dispose of it properly.
- Properly dispose of anything that displays patient information by burning it, bagging it, shredding it, or boxing it (in a confidential shred box). This includes conference schedules and materials, temporary CRIS printouts, research retrievals, administrative reports and audit files.

Who to Contact for Assistance with Confidentiality Issues

Authorization for Release of Information	Medicolegal Section	496-3331
Media Interaction and Policy	CC Communications	496-2563
Breach of Confidentiality	Privacy Officer	496-4240
Special Privacy Requirements	Patient Representative	496-2626

I, the undersigned, further understand and agree that the consequences of a violation of the above statements may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination, loss of privileges, or termination of the relationship.

_____	_____	_____
Signature	Printed Name	Date