



Privacy of health information

All General Practices are required by law to have a system to manage the confidentiality and privacy of patient health information.

The Federal Privacy Act (2001) states that a patient's information includes a person's name, address, account details, Medicare number and any health information about the person.

In order to meet the RACGP Standards for General Practices 3rd Edition, practices are required to have a documented policy for the management of patient health information. The policy needs to outline:

- procedures for informing new patients about privacy arrangements in the Practice – usually included in the practice information sheet. This information should include how patients are informed about the use of their information for quality assurance, research and professional development;
- the range of people who may have access to patient health records and the scope of that access;
- procedures for patients to gain access to their health information;
- methods used to gain patients' consent before disclosing their health information to third parties;
- processes for providing health information to other medical practices should patients so request;
- the ways the practice maintains security of information held at the practice (including both paper based and electronic systems);
- the ways the practice addresses complaints about privacy related matters;
- policies relating to the retention and storage of patients' health records.

TIPS

It is recommended that practices have a Privacy Brochure or Notice displayed or available for patients to understand the systems adopted by the practice to ensure their information remains confidential and private at all times. Such a brochure or notice should advise patients of the methods, systems, procedures and policies in relation to the points above and possibly beyond, depending on the circumstances of each practice.

Privacy, confidentiality and security of patient health information is equally important for practices that have paper based, hybrid or computerised systems of information management.

In addition to having a printed brochure or notice for patients, the documented policy should be contained within the practice policy and procedure manual as a reference for all staff.

Reference: RACGP Standards for General Practices 3rd Edition