



Be a HIPAA Hero.

Who is Listening?

What is the preferred way to address patients in a public waiting area?

When addressing patients, it is best to refer to them by first name only. However, it is also acceptable to refer to a patient as “Mrs. Smith” if you know she prefers to be addressed more formally, or if you have more than one patient in the room with the same first name. If you have not met the patient before, it’s good practice to confirm that you have the correct patient by asking for two identifiers, such as full name and birthdate, once you leave the waiting area and are in a private room, prior to discussing any personal health information.

We have a small office. Is it OK to update a patient’s demographic information, such as address and phone number, at the front desk with other patients in the waiting room?

Yes. However, it is best to speak in your “library voice,” especially if your waiting room doesn’t have music or a television for a distraction. You also can confirm demographics by only providing partial information, such as, “Do you still live on River Road?” but not stating the house number.

Put Yourself in the Patient’s Shoes. My mother-in-law was a patient in our office today. Is it OK to tell my husband that I saw his mother, even if I don’t say what for?

No. Never mention a patient to a family member, even if they know the patient. Your mother-in-law may not want her son to

know she visited her physician. The HIPAA and Munson policy definition of “Protected Health Information” includes the very fact that a patient was treated or present.

A patient’s mother is calling to confirm her son’s appointment because she will be providing a ride. Can I give her this information?

Yes. You can give appointment time and information to the mother, just as you can leave this information on an answering machine. However, if the son has specifically requested that his mother not be involved in his care, then you would not disclose information.

Do You Have a Job-Related Need to Know?

Is it OK to check a new patient’s record in PowerChart prior to her initial visit, including previous surgeries, tests, allergies, etc.?

Yes. If a patient has scheduled an appointment with your practice, this is implied consent and you are able to review the patient’s PowerChart record as part of the continuum of care.

Better Safe than Sorry.

A patient is visiting Florida and needs to see a physician while she’s there. She doesn’t have a fax machine at her condo and has called to request that her chart be faxed to the local Office Max. Is this OK?

No. Even though the patient has given permission, faxing a chart to a public machine is risky. Your office can have a policy to refuse to send protected health information to any non-secure location, such as Office

Max or Staples. Instead, offer to mail the patient’s chart to her in Florida or directly fax the chart to the physician she’ll be visiting in Florida.

If the patient is vacationing out of the area, is it OK to get a verbal authorization to release information?

Yes. However, it is good practice to confirm that the person calling is actually the patient by asking qualifying questions, such as birthdate, home address, or last four digits of Social Security number. In these cases, it is also good to document verbal authorization so that you have a record of who called, what was released, date, and the reason why records were released.

What about Me?

I have access to PowerChart. How can I see who has viewed my chart?

1) You have a right to an Accounting of Disclosures. This means that you can call Medical Records and find out who, if anyone, has received a hard copy of your medical record. 2) You have a right to call the Privacy Office at Munson Medical Center and ask for an audit of your Medical Record. Be prepared to provide names of people you suspect may have inappropriately accessed your chart. 3) You have a right to access your own medical record.

I work at a practice where I am also a patient. I suspect a co-worker may have looked in my chart without a job-related need to know. What can I do?

Ask your manager or Munson’s Privacy Officer to conduct a chart audit. Audits can detect who has been in your chart, time and date of access, and what parts of the chart were accessed.

For HIPAA questions or privacy concerns, contact Rochelle Steimel, Munson Privacy Officer, at (231) 935-5765 or rsteimel@mhc.net.

munsonhealthcare.org/hipaa

