



Care Partner Information

Tips for Providing Older Adult Care

Health Information Privacy Rules

All information about a patient's health is private. Health information can only be shared if a person agrees. Doctors and nurses cannot share information with other doctors and nurses unless the patient has said they can, or if there is an important medical reason to share. This is called a "need to know." Doctors and nurses cannot even tell a person's family or close friends unless the patient says they can.

What is HIPAA?

A law called HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) makes the rules about sharing health information. HIPAA gives patients the right to see their own health records. HIPAA also lets patients decide who else can see their records.

The information that cannot not be shared unless the patient says it can includes:

- Diagnosis (what is wrong with the person)
- Prognosis (what is likely to happen to the person)
- Exam results
- Blood test and x-ray results
- What medicine a person is taking
- Hospital records and office records, including electronic records

What does HIPAA mean for patients and their caregivers?

HIPAA is important because it protects patient privacy. But it can also make it harder to know how to care for an older adult. Caregivers may want to know what medicine the person is taking, or how the medicine should be taken. They may want to know about side effects. Doctors and nurses can only share this information if the patient says they can.

This Care Partner Information page is part of a series on older adult caregiving tips. They are written to help family and community caregivers, direct care workers and community health representatives care for older adults. Available in English and Spanish at www.aging.arizona.edu

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How does the patient tell nurses and doctors they can share health information?

The patient has to fill out a special form that names who the doctors and nurses can share information with. Ask at the clinic or the hospital for these forms. Signed forms should be copied and given to other clinics, pharmacies, and hospitals where the patient gets care. Family members and other care partners should also keep copies.

What if the person cannot complete the form to share information?

Things can happen at any age that make it so the person cannot agree to share health information. Sometimes a doctor or nurse can share information with a caregiver when it is in the best interest of the patient. Other times, the caregiver may have to go to court where a judge will decide if the information can be shared. If you have trouble getting the information you need, start by talking to a social worker or patient representative at the clinic, hospital, or health insurance plan.

Remember, anything shared between a person and healthcare providers is private. Health matters should be shared only with those who have a medical “need to know.”

Important Facts About HIPAA

- Family members or friends do not have the right to know medical information unless the patient says they can.
- Patients should think about who they want to share medical information with. Then they should fill out forms at the clinic or hospital that say it is okay.
- It is a good idea to fill out forms to share health information years before it may be needed. You can change your mind about who can see health information at any time.
- Look over HIPAA forms once per year, or more often if the health of the person has changed.
- Make sure the clinic, pharmacy, and hospital have copies of the forms.

Useful Websites

HIPAA: Questions and Answers for Family Caregivers

http://www.nextstepincare.org/uploads/File/NSIC_HIPAA_4.24.pdf

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