

PATIENT CONFIDENTIALITY

The primary purpose of the medical record is to document the course of a patient's illness and treatment during all periods of the patient's care. The medical record is extremely important as a permanent account of the patient care provided. It serves as a means of communication between physician and other health care professionals. As such, it is also a tool for planning and evaluating patient care.

In order for the medical record to be a useful instrument in patient care, it must contain accurate, detailed, personal information relating to each patient's medical, surgical, psychiatric, social, and family history.

Patients have the right to expect their medical records are treated as confidential, and North Idaho Eye Institute personnel have an obligation to safeguard Protected Health Information against unauthorized disclosure. North Idaho Eye Institute is HIPAA compliant and all employees are expected to follow HIPAA guidelines, policies and procedures.

- Patient privacy is maintained orally, electronically, and on paper.
- Employees shall never discuss a patient's medical condition with any non-employee of the practice, friends, or family members.
- Protected Health Information is released/shared on a need to know bases.
- Employees do not discuss patients in public or within the vicinity of other patients. Discussion of Protected Health Information among co-workers can only be for treatment, operation, or payment on a need to know bases and only to personnel involved with direct and identifiable need to receive PHI.
- Patient schedules are covered from public view. Patient lists, charts, and confidential papers are kept out of patient view. Computer screens are angled to prevent patient view and are promptly placed on neutral after finishing current task.
- Papers that contain PHI and are ready for disposal will be placed in a container stored for shredding and not disposed in the regular trash or recycling.
- Patients have a right to inspect, copy, and amend their medical records; receive an accounting of disclosure of PHI; and file a complaint.

If the office received a call in regards to an appointment time for a patient, the steps that should be taken are the following:

- If the patient makes the call and you are unsure of their identity, ask for identifying factor such as year of birth or last four digits of their Social Security number.
- If the caller is not the patient check who is calling and what the relationship of this person is to the patient.

- If the caller claims to be the source of transportation, guardian, etc., check to see if patient has given permission to release information to the caller. If permission has been granted, and you are not sure of the identity of the caller ask for an identifying factor such as year of birth or last four digits of the patient's Social Security Number. If you are reasonable sure of the callers identity, you do not need to secure evidence.
- If permission has not been granted to the caller, take the name and phone number and attempt to problem solve. Attempt to contact the patient to obtain permission to give the original caller the appointment information.

The business office will use the preceding steps for calls concerning billing questions.

If you give out PHI to someone other than to those authorized by the patient, you will need to document who you gave the information to and the reason that you gave it. Use the Accounting of Disclosures of Protected Health Information form and give to the Privacy Officer.