

## **PATIENT INFORMATION/RECORDS**

Many medical workers have access to medical records, x-rays, laboratory reports, and other sources of information concerning patients. All such information is considered confidential and must not be revealed under any circumstances. Only physicians and others specifically authorized to do so may divulge laboratory, medical and surgical findings, and then only to the proper persons. Under federal and state privacy laws unauthorized release of confidential information about patients is not only ethically wrong but could also involve both the individual and SIU in legal action. At no time should individuals call for their own medical record or the records of friends, relatives, or others without legitimate reason. Unauthorized release of confidential information concerning patients may be cause for immediate dismissal.

The medical record is the most complete and permanent repository of all data gathered during examination, diagnosis and treatment by health care providers. It is among the most important assets and is also a very important resource for the care of patients. The ready availability of the patient's medical record facilitates his/her care, serves the convenience of the physician and may be of lifesaving importance on occasion.

Because a sizeable group of personnel are legitimately concerned with the use of medical records in many areas, certain policies have been established so that medical records are properly preserved and safeguarded and their whereabouts are known at all times. As a resident or fellow at SIU, you are expected to know these policies and follow the procedures for safeguarding the integrity of medical records. The general guidelines are as follows:

- The Medical Records Access Policy applies to all medical information, whether in written, oral, reproduced or electronic form.
- No part of a patient's medical record or reproductions thereof may be released to anyone outside of the institution other than the patient without written authorization from the patient. (For exceptions, see "RELEASE OF MEDICAL INFORMATION".)
- Medical records shall be requested only for SIU business or routine duties.
- Personal medical records or those of family members cannot be requisitioned.
- The medical record must stay on site and be traceable in the record-keeping system.
- The medical record and the patient will not be separated in the hospital.
- Handle sensitive tests and results appropriately according to institutional procedures, but do not be overly restrictive or draw attention to the tests or reports.
- Patient information obtained from electronic systems must be treated with the same degree of confidentiality as the paper medical record. You are responsible for information accessed using your password. Temporary printed reports must be discarded appropriately. Patient information must not be left on screens where it would be visible to others. Please logoff all systems when you are done.

## **RELEASE OF MEDICAL INFORMATION**

### **HIPAA, ILLINOIS LAW AND SIU POLICY**

Information given by a patient to a physician or acquired by a physician through examination and treatment of a patient is confidential. By law, medical information should not be communicated to anyone unless the patient has given written consent or unless the situation falls within one of the exceptions to the law. This applies regardless of the seemingly innocent nature of the request or the character of the inquirer (e.g., health care provider, attorney, insurance representative, investigator, relative).

### **LEGAL EXCEPTIONS**

- Release of medical information may be made without a patient's written consent in a medical emergency when you are unable to obtain the patient's consent due to the patient's condition or the nature of the medical emergency.
- Medical information may be exchanged with any healthcare provider without written patient authorization when necessary for current treatment, unless the patient has requested that medical information not be sent to that provider. Additionally, specific written authorization would still be required in accord with Federal law if the information to be released contains drug and/or alcohol treatment information.
- Statutes or appropriate regulations may require that you give information to specified public authorities. Examples are the reporting of gunshot wounds, suspected maltreatment of minors, animal bites, certain communicable diseases, and the information required for a certificate of death. If you are in doubt in these cases, do not assume that the information may be given. Instead, seek the advice of a member of the Legal Department.