

HIPAA Hints

Adapted by Anita Westbrook from Press Ganey ‘Solution Starter’

Patient Privacy in an Atmosphere of Comfort, Hope and Healing

Privacy is a key aspect in creating an atmosphere of comfort, hope and healing. No one wants to feel as if their privacy has been violated, especially when they often already feel helpless because they cannot control their health situation. Patients feel that their privacy has not been respected when:

- The patient experienced inappropriate nakedness, where parts of the body might be exposed to others unrelated to the patient’s care.
- Staff fail to respect the patient’s room as equivalent to their home, e.g., did not knock before entering, did not announce themselves, handled patient’s belongings inappropriately, picked up a gift without permission, etc.
- Staff fail to respect the patient’s need for personal, private space – especially important when feeling ill and vulnerable.
- Staff relay information volunteered by the person in their care to inappropriate parties.

Voice of the Patient/Family:

- “I felt like I was in a fish bowl for everyone to observe.”
- “I could hear everything going on with the other patient, as well as the nurses talking about them!”
- “My grandfather was left in a gown that barely covered him on a stretcher in the hallway.”

Improvement Tips:

- Knock/seek permission before entering the patient’s room.
- Close door/screen/curtain when leaving. Use key words to inform the patient why the door is being closed. For example, “For your privacy, I’m going to close this curtain.”
- Handle the patient’s belongings with care and respect after first seeking permission.
- Do not leave the patient’s body exposed. Take care to cover the patient whenever not directly prohibited by a procedure. Cover the patient in front of others, especially family.

- Do not abandon the patient in public places (e.g. hallway, elevator, etc.)
- Do not discuss the patient or family with other staff unless necessary. In other words, don’t “gossip.” When you are discussing their condition, be as discreet and private as possible (e.g. not public places).
- Respect the space and privacy of those in your care when speaking with clergy, pastoral care professionals, social service professionals, psychiatric professionals and/or family members.
- Close the door before discussing the patient’s medical care, treatment, condition and other aspects of illness with them. If such discussion must take place in an exposed area (e.g. patient’s room with a roommate present) take precautions such as pulling the curtain and speaking in a lower voice.
- Be aware of visitors when asking patients questions about their condition or providing information about their test results or diagnosis. Be sure it is all right to have this discussion in front of visitors before you begin talking.
- Be especially vigilant with regard to the privacy of patients who are also UAMS employees.
- Provide patients with the UAMS Notice of Privacy Practices, which explains how they can expect their health information to be protected.
- Provide patients with a clear recourse should they feel their privacy has been compromised such as calling the UAMS HIPAA Office Compliance reporting line at 501-614-2187 or initiating the general patient complaint process.

UAMS HIPAA Office
<http://hipaa.uams.edu>
603-1379

Did you know that each question on the Press Ganey Patient Satisfaction Survey has a “Solution Starter”? Go to the Patient Satisfaction site on SharePoint for the Solution Starter that corresponds to the survey questions you are working on in your areas. <http://sharepoint.uams.edu/sites/ProjCentral/PatientSatisfaction/default.aspx>