



Current Status: Active

PolicyStat ID: 4964943



Origination: 02/2016
Effective: 02/2016
Last Approved: 02/2016
Last Revised: 02/2016
Next Review: 01/2019
Owner: David Behinfar: HCS-Privacy Dir
Policy Area: HIPAA - Privacy
Policy Tag Groups:
Applicability: UNC Medical Center

Release of Patient Information to the News Media

I. Description

Requirements related to any release of patient information to the news media

II. Rationale

It is the policy of UNC Medical Center to assist the news media in accurately reporting information of community interest and concern; however, UNC Medical Center's ability to comply with requests for information about individual patients is limited by state and federal laws governing the confidentiality of medical records, as well as by patients' wishes regarding their right to privacy. All news media requests for information about patients shall be handled by the UNC Medical Center's Office of Communications, Marketing and External Affairs, the house supervisor and/or the Hospital Director On-Call. Media representatives seeking information about a patient must already have the patient's first and last name. UNC Medical Center will not release any information without first being given the patient's name, except as provided below.

III. Policy

A. Procedure

1. During normal working hours (Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.), all news media inquiries about patients shall be directed to the UNC Medical Center's Office of Communications, Marketing and External Affairs (984-974-1140). Patient-related inquiries after normal working hours should be directed to the house supervisor or Director On-Call, unless other arrangements have been made by the Office of Communications, Marketing and External Affairs. After-hours condition reports on newsworthy patients may be handled through the Office of Communications, Marketing and External Affairs' voice mail, as determined by the Office of Communications, Marketing and External Affairs representative, the house supervisor, or the Director On-Call. The Office of Communications, Marketing and External Affairs representative will inform UNC Hospitals' operators to direct media calls on newsworthy patients to the Office of Public Affairs & Marketing phone number (984-974-1140) for updates.
2. To ensure patient confidentiality, UNC Medical Center reserves the right, when appropriate, to withhold patient information from the media.
3. No information about patients admitted for psychiatric treatment may be released unless the patient or her/his authorized representative consents in writing to the release of the information to a specified person and the attending physician approves release of the information. Therefore, no information may be

released if the apparent cause of the patient's condition is among the following: attempted suicide, mental illness, drug addiction or intoxication. In such circumstances, media representatives requesting information will be told that UNC Medical Center has no information on the person about whom they are calling.

4. Consistent with American Hospital Association (AHA) guidelines and applicable state and federal laws regarding patient confidentiality, the following information may be confirmed to the news media, provided the requestor asks for the patient by first and last name, **unless the patient or her/his family has objected to the inclusion of information in the UNC Medical Center directory, as indicated on the patient's General Consent for Treatment form and/or in the UNC Medical Center's medical record system:**
 - a. The patient's general medical condition: good, fair, serious, critical or deceased. Stable is not considered a patient condition and should not be given out as such. Medical condition definitions are as follows:
 - i. Good – Vital signs are stable and within normal limits. Patient is conscious and comfortable. Prognosis is excellent.
 - ii. Fair – Vital signs are stable and within normal limits. Patient is conscious but may be uncomfortable. Prognosis is favorable.
 - iii. Serious – Vital signs may be unstable and not within normal limits. Patient is acutely ill and may not be conscious. Prognosis is questionable.
 - iv. Critical – Vital signs are unstable and not within normal limits. Patient may not be conscious. Prognosis is unfavorable.
 - b. Although under normal circumstances the location of the patient may be released to an inquirer asking for the patient by name, in the case of an inquiry by the media, location information should not be given.
 - c. If the patient has been discharged, that fact may be confirmed unless the patient or his or her family has objected to the inclusion of information in the UNC Medical Center's hospital directory, as indicated on the patient's General Consent for Treatment form and/or in the UNC Medical Center's medical record system ("opt out").
5. Births and deaths may be confirmed in most cases, after the family has been notified, unless the family has indicated that they do not want the information to be released. In the case of a deceased patient, the date and time of death may not be released unless the authorized representative of the patient signs an **HIM #739s form** authorizing release of such information (consistent with AHA guidelines). No information may be released regarding the cause of death.
6. No information about a patient other than a one-word condition should be released without the written authorization of the patient or the patient's authorized representative. The authorization should be in the approved **HIM #739s form** and state what information may be released, and a copy of the form must be sent to Medical Information Management ("MIM"), to be placed in the patient's medical record. Release of information about diagnosis, treatment and prognosis must be authorized by the attending physician, as well as by the patient or the patient's authorized representative.
7. The name of the attending physician should not be released without her/his permission.
8. UNC Medical Center will honor requests from patients or their families that no information be released to the news media, either through the opt-out provisions contained in the General Consent for Treatment form or, if such requests are made to the patient's physician, the Public Affairs & Marketing Office, the

House Supervisor, or the Director On-Call, either directly or through the attending physician. The attending physician will note the patient's or family's request in the patient's medical record.

9. In the event of a disaster or other event that is the subject of intense media coverage, and when multiple patients are admitted to UNC Hospitals, the number of patients brought to the facility by gender or general age group (such as "adults," "children," "teenagers") may be released to help dispel public anxiety. In addition, information about the condition of such patients may be released in a generalized form, such as: "We are treating 10 patients injured in the explosion: four are in critical condition and six are in serious condition." Under these circumstances, no information should be released that would allow individual patients to be identified without the specific written authorization of the patient involved. The UNC Medical Center's Office of Communications, Marketing and External Affairs shall make all releases related to a disaster event.
10. Requests made by law enforcement agencies for information other than a patient's general condition shall be handled consistent with UNC Medical Center Policy, ADMIN #0155, "Releases of PHI to Law Enforcement Officers," which requires any such request to be referred to UNC Hospitals Police (984-974-3686).

Attachments:

No Attachments

Applicability

UNC Medical Center

COPY