

(sometimes a small charge may be made). However information does not have to be given to you if it is also about another person or if giving it to you would cause serious harm to you or to someone else. You can also ask for inaccurate information about you to be changed and for steps to be taken if you have suffered distress.

DUTIES OF STAFF CONCERNING YOUR CONFIDENTIALITY

All staff working in health and social care services in Northern Ireland are under both a legal and an ethical duty to protect the confidentiality of personal information relating to patients and service users. Action can be taken against staff if they fail to comply with these duties. If you feel that your right to confidentiality has not been properly protected, please raise your concerns with senior staff. You may wish to contact your local Patient and Client Council, which can help you to raise your concerns.



Department of
**Health, Social Services
and Public Safety**

www.dhsspsni.gov.uk

AN ROINN
**Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta
agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí**

MÁNNYSTRIE O
**Poustie, Resydènter Heisin
an Fowk Siccar**

KEEPING IT, CONFIDENTIAL!



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Further information about the issues mentioned in this leaflet can be found in the *Code of Practice on Protecting the Confidentiality of Service User Information*, published by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

YOUR RIGHT TO CONFIDENTIALITY

As a patient in the health service or user of social care services you will be asked by health or social care staff to supply personal information about yourself. This is so that you can receive appropriate treatment and care. The information you supply is stored very carefully because you have a legal right to have such personal details kept confidential.

This right to confidentiality is guaranteed partly by the Data Protection Act 1998, partly by the Human Rights Act 1998, and partly by principles established by judges on a case-by-case basis. In addition there are ethical standards which staff within the health and social care sector are obliged to abide by. All staff are committed to ensuring that your information is kept secure.

SHARING YOUR INFORMATION

Of course the information you supply often needs to be shared with other people who are involved in providing you with health or social care. Such sharing is an essential part of the provision of many aspects of modern health and social care, which

depend on the involvement of professionals working in teams and applying their own particular expertise to enhance your care. Members of your care team may need to know, for example, what medication you have been prescribed, and why. But even this sharing of information is lawful only if it is necessary to ensure that you are properly cared for. If you do not understand how or why your information will be shared, please ask a member of staff providing you with care to explain this to you, or contact a senior manager in the organisation.

USING YOUR INFORMATION FOR THE BENEFIT OF OTHERS

In many circumstances it is extremely beneficial for the health and social care system as a whole to be able to use information about individuals so that there can, for example, be efficient planning of how to provide services, the proper maintenance of accounts, probity checking to provide assurance on the level of service provision, the provision of appropriate training to staff, and adequate monitoring of the outcome of treatments. But in all such cases your information is wherever possible anonymised or in some other way coded so as to conceal your identity. If it is

not possible to conceal your identity your information can normally be used only if you first give your consent to its use.

DISCLOSING YOUR INFORMATION IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

There may be other times when the law allows disclosure of your information because it is very much in the public interest. For instance, disclosure may become necessary to reduce the chances of someone suffering harm (especially if that person is a child or otherwise vulnerable), to enable alleged misconduct by health and social care staff to be investigated, or to protect the general public against the spread of infectious diseases. But even in these circumstances your information will, generally speaking, not be disclosed in a way which identifies you as an individual by name.

YOUR RIGHT TO SEE WHAT IS HELD ABOUT YOU

You have a legal right to see information held about you by health and social care organisations if you ask for it in writing