

Patient identification

Correct patient identification is essential for patient safety and the maintenance of patient confidentiality. Practices must use at least three approved identifiers for each patient encounter or activity, such as making appointments, writing prescriptions, writing referrals, giving results or entering results or correspondence into records.

4th Edition RACGP Standards

3.1.4A/ *Our practice has a patient identification process using three approved patient identifiers and the practice team can describe how it is applied.*

Assessment methods

Staff Interviews

Surveyors will interview the GPs, clinical staff and administrative staff to determine if a patient identification process using three approved patient identifiers is used. Staff should be able to describe how patient identifiers are applied at their practice.

Meeting the Standards

Approved patient identifiers are those items of information accepted for use in patient identification and include:

- Patient name, both family and given names;
- Date of birth;
- Gender, as identified by the patient themselves;
- Address; and
- Patient record number where it exists, and is known by the patient.

Please note that a Medicare number is not an approved identifier. When asking for patient identifier information, staff should ask the patient to state his or her identifying information, such as name, date of birth and address, rather than volunteering the information from the record the staff member has open. It's important that staff be mindful of patient privacy and confidentiality when asking patients for identifier information.

Best practice

Ideally, patient identification processes will be outlined in the policies and procedures manual, and in staff induction programs.

It is important that GPs and staff always check they have the right patient and the right health record at the same time: unfortunately, errors can occur when patients have similar names, or a previous record is not closed and then is accidentally used again in error. If errors in patient identification do occur, it's important that every member of the practice team be encouraged to report them, so that the event can be analysed, and processes introduced to reduce the risk of a recurrence and harm occurring to other patients. This does cross reference with 3.1.2 Clinical risk management systems.

Whilst not required, some practices choose to display signage in regard to the use of patient identifier processes. It can help patients to understand why they are being asked to confirm their identify when arriving, and when seeing a GP or other clinical staff.