

Confidentiality and privacy of health information

It is essential that all patient health information collected is kept private and confidential and is only accessible to authorised GPs and clinical staff. Practices must have a documented privacy policy for the management of patient health information.

RACGP 4th Edition Standards

4.2.1 *Our practice collects personal health information and safeguards its confidentiality and privacy in accordance with Australian Privacy Principles.*

(NB. the Standards refer to the National Privacy Principles, however these have since been superseded by the new Australian Privacy Principles)

Assessment methods

- Interviews with GPs and practice staff

It is essential that all practice staff be able to confidently describe how the practice ensures the confidentiality of patient health records. Staff should be able to confidently describe and/or be able to demonstrate how patient health records can be accessed by appropriate staff when required, and be able to describe the processes used to provide patients with access to their own health information and procedures for transferring relevant patient health information to another service provider. Staff should be familiar with the Australian Privacy Principles and be able to describe how the practice incorporates these in its privacy and confidentiality processes.

- Documentation review

Surveyors will request to see a copy of the practice's documented privacy policy. If applicable, evidence of recent health information being transferred to another service provider may be seen in the patient health records reviewed on the day of the survey visit.

Meeting the Standards

Practices must have a document that clearly sets out their policies on handling personal information, including health information. This document, commonly called a privacy policy, must be made available to anyone who asks for it. It is expected that each practice's printed information sheet will include the practice's policy for the management of patient health information, which comes under Criterion 1.2.1 Practice information. The privacy policy topics do not need to be on the printed information sheet. Ideally, there will be a separately documented privacy policy that describes, in detail, the essential topics, and this privacy policy must be available to any patients or visitors who might request it. For more information on what must be included, please refer to the separate *GPA Privacy policy* fact sheet.

If a practice does collect patient health information for quality improvement or professional development activities, then it must only transfer identified information to a third party after patient consent has been obtained. If any practice staff conduct research involving practice patients, then the practice must be able to demonstrate that the research undertaken has appropriate approval from an ethics committee.

Best practice

Ideally, the practice's policies and procedures manual will outline confidentiality and privacy of health information processes.