

Research paper on patient privacy

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Patient privacy has been a controversial topic in many health facilities both within and without the United States. One thing that is important to note is that patients go to hospitals and other facilities due to the confidence that they have in these institutions in terms of their recovery. However, hospitals have to create health records of their patients so that they can effectively deal with and treat the ailments that are facing various patients that visit various health centers. In spite of the fact that medical officers have access to the health records of patients, it is important to understand that patients also have personal lives out of the hospitals. This means that patients are connected to members of their families, friends, and work mates. All these people may at times want to know the health circumstances of the patients. The responsibility of disseminating this information to the public can be done by the hospitals, but it would be a breach of the law for medical personnel to dispatch such information to the public domain without the consent of the patients. The paper will look at the importance of patient privacy and some of the challenges that are associated with patient privacy.

First of all, it is important to understand that some patients may at times be diagnosed with chronic diseases that may at times eventually lead to their death. Considering that patients have dependents that might be reliant on the patients for survivor, it is reasonable for medical personnel to release such information to their next of kin so that they can be able to adjust accordingly to the ailments that are facing their loved ones (Lidz, 1992, p. 39) However, it is important to also note that there are some diseases that might have chronic effects but at the same time affect the relationship of the patient with his or her family and society at large. For example, patients

suffering from HIV/AIDs may at times experience shame regarding the diseases that they suffer from. A disease like HIV is contracted through sexual activity. The knowledge of the health conditions of a HIV patient might cause the patient to be deserted by their families, friends, and in some cases their work mates. Therefore, there is a need that medical personnel dispatch such information with a lot of caution and care so that they do not put the patient into trouble or in awkward situations that might affect how patients go through with their lives. One of the ways that, medical personnel can be able to enhance confidentiality and privacy for the patients is by making sure that they consult with the patient about whether information relating to the condition of their health is revealed to other persons such as members of their immediate families. In so doing, the people who obtain this information are authorized by the patient. However, it is important not to forget that diseases such as HIV can be transmitted to other people if people living around the patient are not aware of the health conditions of the patient. Therefore, medical personnel should engage the patients in some counseling about the importance to releasing some of the vital information about the health records of the patients to their loved ones. This is because doing so will reduce the likelihood of immediate families contracting diseases as a result of their lack of knowledge about the health conditions of patients. Chronic diseases that face patients may at times change the capacities of the patients in terms of their ability to undertake their daily activities. This means that families have to be informed about the health conditions of their loved ones so that they can be able to make important changes in life. This would include the idea of depending on the patient for their livelihood and

the directing of some of their finances towards supporting the patient in the future in terms of care and medical expenses. Some of the family members might not take the information regarding the health of their loved ones very kindly especially if the patient has diseases that could bring shame such as HIV. The knowledge of family members that one of their own has such a disease could lead to the breakage of a marriage and the alteration of the normal life and cohesion of the family. Therefore, before releasing private information regarding the health conditions and records of patients, immediate families should be advised on their need to take the situation as it is and not to blow thing out of proportion. In fact, advising family members before releasing vital health information regarding patients is important because some of the family members would be suffering from the some ailment without their knowledge. For example, if a patient is married and suffering from HIV, there is a likelihood that the patient has either passed the disease to their spouses or contracted it from their spouse. Therefore, releasing of information is fundamental, but should be done in cautious way that involves the patient so as not to tarnish the reputation of the health facility.

Health facilities have large amounts of employees who are involved in the daily running of these institutions. These employees range from nurses to doctors to clinical officers. Employees have designated shifts in health facilities such that there are no personnel that work in hospitals on a 24/7 basis. At the transition of shifts health records and information regarding patients has to switch hands from the outgoing staff to the incoming staff. Considering the continued change of hands that are involved in hospital with

regards to patient information, the likelihood that some information might be leaked to the public domain is very high. In order to protect information regarding patients and their health conditions, there is a need for health facilities and institutions to adopt strict rules and regulation which governs and shapes the behavior of their employees both within and without their jobs. Punitive expeditions regarding the actions that should be taken on employees who release censored information to the public should be well outlined in the rules and regulations of these health institutions. In this way, hospitals and other health institutions can be able to deter employees from releasing vital information regarding patients to members of the public. Some diseases that patients might be suffering from are curable. These diseases might be contracted through sexual encounters or other actions that illustrate unfaithfulness in relationships and marriages. Doctors and medical personnel should not disclose such information to family members unless they feel that there is a necessity to. This is because doing so would create complication on the part of patients yet it is from these ailments that patients can be in a position to become better people who have respect from their marriages and other partnerships that they might be involved in. However, if medical personnel perceive that it is important for immediate family members to have knowledge of this information, then they have to do so with the consent of the patient, so that the patient does not place the liability on the medical personnel for passing such information to members of the family.

In addition, it is worthwhile to note that the cost of Medicare especially in the United States is very high. Many people in the United States protect

themselves from financial challenges of health care through taking health insurance. This insurance helps patients access finances for treatment in case they fall ill. In the light of this, it is prudent that insurance firms gain access to the health records of the patients so that they can establish the amount of financing that they are going to direct towards a patient. One thing that is worth noting is that health insurance individuals are in most cases not family members of the patients. Some of the insurance personnel are in the market to make money and are not concerned about the negative impacts that they might create on the patient if they released health information regarding a patient who is their customer. This means that there is likelihood that the health records and information may be released to the public domain through insurance personnel. Some of the patients might be celebs or other public figures that might create lots of interest among the members of the public. As a way of avoiding this disappointment that might result from insurance personnel, there is a need for patients and healthy people in general to make sure that the companies from which they obtain health insurance have a strict policy about the confidentiality of patient and costumer information. In this way patients can be able to protect themselves from embarrassment that might result from the release of information by insurance companies.

Some of the chronic diseases that face patients may at times require quick actions such as surgery. It might be uncertain about the outcomes of such medical procedures. Some of these medical procedures might lead to death of the patients. In order to avoid liability and expensive legal battles that might result from such procedures, it is important that the health conditions

of the patients be relayed to some of the people who are closest to the patients. This is the reason as to why many health facilities and institution ask patients to fill in forms regarding who should be consulted and informed about their situations. In this way, these close friends or family members are well prepared about the news that might emanate from the medical procedures that are conducted on patients.

Some of the patients might be public figures such as is the case of Nelson Mandela of South Africa. This means that members of the media have to be updated about the conditions of the patient so that they can report the information to members of the public. However, letting members of the media to access such information may lead to the extrapolation of issues and some cases the passing of information that is incorrect. For example, in the case of Nelson Mandela, there have been many incidences where many reporters both domestically and internationally have incorrectly reported that he was dead. All this information has in the long run turned out to be incorrect. Bearing in mind, the high likelihood of the manipulation of information that might emanate from the media, it is important that hospitals have spokespersons who can officially give information to the members of the media in an organized manner. In this way, hospitals and other health institutions can be able to protect patients from being displayed in a different light in the public eye and at the same time address the concerns that members of the public might have about the conditions of a given patient.

Definitive visitors' policies are some of the ways in which hospitals can be in a position to protect patients and preserve the confidentiality of patients.

Patients should be consulted about some of the peoples who come to see them in hospitals. This would mean that individuals that patients do not consent to see them should not be allowed to see them. This is because the people who see them in hospitals play a key role in sensitizing members of the public about the conditions of patients (Kilpi, 2000, p. 57). Some of the people who might visit patients might have negative intentions of tarnishing the reputations of patients. Therefore, patients who are in stable conditions should be consulted about the people who arrive in hospitals with the aim of seeing them. Hospitals should also have definitive security system that ensures that patients are in constant severance such that unwanted personnel cannot gain access to patients. In addition, activities such as taking of photos in hospitals should be contained such that patients assent to such ideas if they arise. In addition, hospitals should have hours when nobody is allowed to visit patients so that patients are given their space with their doctors for treatment and deliberations about their conditions and how they are faring. In this way, patient information and health condition can be contained and kept confidential between the doctor and the patient.

Hospitals and other health facilities are also adherents of the law. Some of the medical records that might be obtained from a patient might establish that a patient has been violating the law. For example, toxic drugs that are illegal might be found in the system of the patient. Hospitals have a moral and ethical responsibility of making sure that such actions are contained by informing law enforcement officers regarding such a case. However, before such an action is undertaken, it is important that the patient be informed of the legal action and obligation that the hospital has regarding such a case. In

this way, hospitals are able to free themselves from repercussions that might emanate from the concealing of the medical records and reports of patient. Information such as the abuse of illegal drugs by a given patient might be integral in adding law enforcement officers to curb illegal activities that might affect the health of the American citizenry (Brazier, 2011, p. 44). In spite of the confidentiality that exists in hospitals and health facilities regarding the health records and information of patients, these institutions are governed by a moral code of ethics which allows them to disclose vital information regarding health records of patients to members of the family, the general public, and in some cases to law enforcement officers.

References

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