

Issues of confidentiality



Confidentiality

Confidentiality is a serious concern in the medical field. Physicians, nurses, assistants, as well as all other staff members must keep all information that the patient reveals private. With advancement in the technology field, privacy is becoming more difficult. A breach of confidentiality is when information is told about a patient to another person without the patient's consent. A patient needs to know that they can disclose all information in regards to their situation and it will be kept private. The physician/patient relationship is based on trust. With this trust, the patient may disclose more information and the physician can better diagnosis the problem.

A breach of confidentiality happened in the case of Dr. Orbit's patient, Katrina Katt. Katrina was a popular television anchor, who had a sexual transmitted disease (STD). Sabrina, a medical assistant, asked Dr. Orbit's nurse about Katrina's visit. She also looked into Katrina medical file to see all of Katrina's information. Sabrina had no reason to look at the file except for curiosity of what was going on with the anchorwoman. As a medical professional you are not granted full access to any file you wish to view. Sabrina should not have let her curiosity get in the way of her ethical duties. She even went further and emailed her husband the information who in turn tells others. Dr. Orbit's nurse should not have disclosed any information to Sabrina. She should have let Sabrina know she would not violate her patient's rights. But by her allowing this to happen, the nurse was responsible for the breach of confidentiality also

Summary

The Patient's Bill of Rights states that a patient's records will be held confidential. If the medical staff at Dr. Orbit's office had followed the AAMA Code of Ethics this situation would not have happened. All information must be kept private unless the patient has given consent to disclose. Congress passed the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) in 1996. This was passed to make a standard way of protecting patient's health records. Civil and criminal penalties can result in HIPAA violations. Even though Dr. Orbit had no knowledge of the breach of confidentiality in his office, he can be held liable for it. Sabrina, the nurse and Dr. Orbit can be sued for violation of HIPAA laws. They can face fines and even jail time.

Katrina's popularity might make the information continue to spread. With the diagnosis being a STD, which is a very sensitive issue, this may cause unnecessary humility. More people will want to know about it since she is in the public's eye. This can cause her a lot of embarrassment and could even cause her to lose her employment due to humility. The medical staff showed no respect to this patient and her medical needs. This situation could have been avoided by following a standard set of rules regarding privacy that the office should have in place. Having a standard procedure to follow helps eliminate some human errors. Co-workers need to keep each other accountable for their actions. The procedures need to be updated as needed and reviewed frequently by all personnel. The patient's privacy should come first above any curiosity of their own.

Conclusion

Medical professionals have an ethical and legal obligation to maintain the patient's privacy. They are trusted with information from the patient. The physician/patient relationship is a bond that should not be broken. The patient needs to know that any information that they disclose will be held private. The patient could withhold important information if they do not feel that it will be held confidential. This can cause misdiagnosis in many situations. If there is a breach of confidentiality, the person involved can have civil and even criminal charges brought against them.