



POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

SUBJECT: PROTECTING HEALTH INFORMATION AFTER FACILITY CLOSURE
POLICY NO: 390.3

PURPOSE:

To provide guidelines to protect the integrity of patient health information in accordance with applicable federal and state laws in the event that a Department of Health Services (DHS) facility ceases to operate.

POLICY:

It is the policy of DHS to (1) protect the confidentiality of the information contained in patient health records; and (2) assure future access by patients, for future health care needs, and other authorized uses in the event of a DHS facility closure.

PROCEDURE:

1. Upon notification of possible closure, the affected DHS facility's administration will begin planning for proper disposition of medical records.
2. To assure accurate information for continuing care, all health information must be completed before the records are archived/stored. This includes transcription of all dictated reports and interpretation of any diagnostic tests.
3. If a DHS facility ceases operation, the medical records will be transferred to another DHS facility. If transfer to another DHS facility is not feasible, the records will be stored with a commercial storage vendor contracted by DHS.
4. Before records are transferred to another County facility or stored, patients shall be notified, if possible, and given an opportunity to obtain copies of their records. Letters may be sent to former patients, or announcements may be repeated in local newspapers and professional journals, etc., to notify patients and their physicians about the upcoming closure/dissolution and let them know how to access their information. Patients are to be given at least one month to request copies of their records.
5. The notification letter to patients shall include:
 - a. The date the facility will close;

APPROVED BY:
REVIEW
DATES:

EFFECTIVE DATE: May 1, 2007

SUPERSEDES: March 1, 2004

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

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- b. Notification of where the records will be stored and how to access them;
 - c. A Request to Access Health Information form to be completed in order for the patient to receive a copy of his/her medical records;
 - d. Notification that only written requests for copies of health information will be honored; and
 - e. Notification of any time limitations (submission deadlines) on the period of time during which requests will be accepted.
6. DHS shall retain a copy of the actual letter sent to patients, along with the mailing list, post office receipt, and all returned (undeliverable) envelopes.
7. In the event of the closure of a DHS hospital facility, within 48 hours of ceasing to operate, DHS will notify the State Department of Health Services of its plan for the safe preservation of medical records.

REFERENCES:

AHIMA Practice Brief: Protecting Patient Information After a Facility Closure (November 2003)
Title 22, California Code of Regulations, Section 70751(d)

CROSS REFERENCE:

DHS Policy 881, Retention of Medical Records and X-Ray Films

EFFECTIVE

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PAGE 2 OF 2