



The Hospital + Healthsystem
Association of Pennsylvania

Leading for Better Health

Guidelines for Releasing Information on Hospital Patients

The federal [Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996](#) (HIPAA) includes privacy regulations that govern what patient information may, or may not, be released to individuals outside the hospital, including the media.

These guidelines are intended to help members of the media and the public better understand the legal issues and rules when seeking patient information from a hospital.

Hospitals and health systems are responsible for protecting the privacy and confidentiality of their patients and patient information.

Patients have the right to ask that information be withheld. As long as a patient has not made this request, hospitals can release the following information without obtaining prior patient authorization:

1. **Name**—Information can be released to those people (media included) who ask for the patient by name. Information cannot be released to an individual unless that person knows the patient's name.
2. **Condition**—A one-word explanation of the patient's condition can be released.
3. **Location within the hospital**—As long as prohibited information is not revealed, such as the patient being treated for substance abuse, the location can be released.
4. **Religion**—This information can be released only to clergy on request. Clergy do not need to ask for the individual by name. Hospitals are not obligated to collect this information. If hospitals collect this information, they should inform the patient why they are collecting it and inform the patient that it will be handed over to clergy if requested.

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