



PURPOSE

It is the responsibility of DHR Health to protect the health, legal rights, and general welfare of its patients. This policy sets forth the guidelines and requirements for news media inquiries to (1) protect patient privacy rights and (2) maintain a centralized channel of communication by and between the news media with DHR Health (“DHR”) employees, physicians, contractors, business partners, or other parties with a material interest in DHR.

DEFINITION

The Media News Policy is designed to protect the confidentiality of patients in compliance with privacy standards for healthcare information as dictated by The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA). The DHR Health Corporate Communications Department has the responsibility and authority to manage communications with the media. The full cooperation of all hospital departments and personnel is critical to achieving our communications goals and protecting patient privacy.

POLICY

The Corporate Communications Department is responsible for all media relations for DHR, and any other Hospital owned entity. This includes disseminating press releases and handling all media inquiries during normal working hours (8:00 am to 5:00 pm) Monday to Friday, at (956) 362-3100. After hours, a Corporate Communications Department representative can be reached by reporting the inquiry to the on-call Senior Management Administrator.

PROCEDURE

All media inquiries should be directed to the Corporate Communications Department at (956) 362-3100, or designated assignee as the Official Hospital Spokesperson. This is to ensure that all inquiries can be handled and organized in a proper and timely manner for media requests. The Corporate Communications Department should be contacted in a crisis situation and in all matters concerning organizational policy, services, programs, procedures, patients, and employees.

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HIPAA Regulations and Release of Patient Information

Any patient medical information released to news media will be done in strict accordance with HIPAA, which requires healthcare institutions to safeguard the privacy and integrity of patients and their personal health information. DHR may refrain from releasing information about a patient involving cases of sensitive nature or to ensure their security.

All media inquiries for information about patients must be coordinated through the Corporate Communications Department. The following standards have been established for news media inquiries about the status of patients:

- 1) All media inquiries must include the specific patient’s name and exact spelling.
- 2) As long as the patient has not requested that information be withheld, we may release a one-word condition statement regarding the patient’s condition (see below).
- 3) Release of any medical information beyond the condition requires written authorization by the patient or patient’s legal representative. Note: Public agencies (law enforcement, fire/rescue, etc.) are not bound by the same standards.

- 4) Videotaped or tape-recorded interviews, photographs or any other interaction with a patient requires written patient authorization.
- 5) The patient has the option to expressly state that he or she does not want information released, including confirmation of his or her presence in the facility.
- 6) Public Record Cases: Patients involved in matters of public record have the same privacy rights as all other patients. For instance, the fact that a patient has been transported to the hospital from an accident, crime scene or fire has no bearing on the patient's privacy. The name verification and one-word condition rule still applies. In such cases, media inquiries would be referred to the appropriate public agency, including the medical examiner, law enforcement agency, fire/rescue transport agency or health department that receives such reports.

For any patient under the age of 18, a parent or legal guardian must provide written consent before granting an interview, releasing medical information, or being photographed or videotaped.

Patient Condition Checks

All requests for Condition Checks should be made to the Charge Nurse during normal working hours. In the absence of the charge nurse, this must be done through the House Supervisor.

Condition Checks will not be made without the patient's name, and can only be issued if the patient agrees and gives their consent and the family has not opted out of the hospital directory. This is to fulfill the legal obligation to ensure the security of patient information. If a patient gives their consent to a Condition Check, a one-word indication on their progress will be issued. No further information concerning their injuries, ward location, home addresses and telephone numbers will be released.

The following are the official hospital conditions, as defined by HIPAA:

- **Undetermined:** Patient awaiting physician assessment.
- **Good:** Vital signs are stable and within normal limits. Patient is conscious and comfortable. Indicators are excellent.
- **Fair:** Vital signs are stable and within normal limits. Patient is conscious, but may be uncomfortable. Indicators are favorable.
- **Serious:** Vital signs may be unstable and not within normal limits. Patient is acutely ill. Indicators are questionable.
- **Critical:** Vital signs are unstable and not within normal limits. Patient may be unconscious. Indicators are unfavorable.

Dealing with Patient Concerns

DHR receives inquiries from the media about patients who may have raised an issue concerning their care. We have a legal duty not to discuss a patient's individual circumstances with a third party, even if that individual is prepared to talk openly. We cannot comment if a patient has submitted a formal complaint, as these situations need to be progressed fairly and impartially.

Press Conferences

There may be times when DHR has significant news to deliver to the local media. In this event, a Press Conference will be called to help the media interview delegated representatives and provide approved information for newspapers, radio and television journalists.

Major Incidents

The Official Hospital Spokesperson is the Public Information Officer / Emergency Communications Lead, and in the event of any local emergency, they will be on hand to help the media with any inquiries. The Official Hospital Spokesperson also works closely with communication leads for all emergency services in the area, including police, fire, ambulance service and local authorities.

Media Visits to Hospital Sites

Media visits to DHR must be cleared in advance through the Corporate Communications Department. Unannounced media visitors will be escorted from the premises by security immediately to ensure patient safety. Our role is to try and facilitate such visits when appropriate. Media access, including but not limited to reporters, photographers and television film crews, may be limited or denied to any area of the DHR facility at the discretion of patients' healthcare teams or individual physicians.