

Medical Confidentiality

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Introduction

At one point in life, each and every one of us has sought for medical intervention. For an effective treatment, physicians need to get accurate information regarding a patient illness. This information will guide the physician in making an accurate diagnosis of a patient's condition. In their quest for getting quality health services, patients volunteer very sensitive information relating to their health status. In return, they have high expectations that the healthcare personnel will respect their privacy and keep the information confidential. There is a great debate that is surfacing about the confidentiality of patient's information. Some researches have been conducted while others are underway on the role of healthcare personnel in upholding medical confidentiality . With the emergence of technology, there is a high risk of breaching the codes of medical confidentiality. This paper will, therefore, look into the issues that surround medical confidentiality.

Medical confidentiality

Medical confidentiality is a confidential relationship that exists between a health care provider and a patient so as to enhance the free flow of information from the patient to the medical personnel to come up with a sound medical care . Confidentiality in medicine is one of the core duties that the healthcare providers need to uphold to build trust between the patient and the healthcare provider. A breach of confidentiality would spell doom to the provision of health services. Mistrust between patient and the healthcare provider would mean that while seeking for treatment, the patient would hold on sensitive information which could have an adverse impact on the treatment provided.

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A study by Hodgson, Mendenhall and Lamson indicated that having a trusting environment created through respecting patient's privacy, give motivation to the patient to provide honest information regarding their health while seeking for healthcare intervention . Most patients fear that if their family members or employers have knowledge about their medical condition they will experience discrimination. Therefore, to safeguard the information, these patients end up giving inaccurate health information. It is, therefore, important that the healthcare providers provide assurance that the information furnished by the patient will be kept private and confidential.

Medical confidentiality prohibits the health care providers from sharing or disclosing patient's information without their consent. Health care providers are mandated to take precautions and ensure that only authorized individuals get access to patient's information so as to maintain confidentiality. Health care providers have a duty of explaining to the patient on who will have access to the information and who will not have access to the information. For a patient to get appropriate medical care there is a need for the patient information to be discussed among all the members of the medical team. It will mean that all the team members will have authorized access to the information and hence should protect the information from unauthorized access. With the advancement in technology keeping information private and confidential has become a significant challenge. Electronic medical records pose a high risk of falling into wrong hands . Therefore, health care institutions are required to have in place policies that guard and protect patient's electronic information.

Even though physicians and other medical personnel are prohibited from disclosing patient's information, some incidences present where the healthcare provider might be inclined to

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disclose patient information. In a research by Crook on ‘Risks of Absolute Medical Confidentiality’, it was established that most physicians receive immense pressure for the patient's spouse to disclose medical information . In this case, the patient should give explicit permission to share information regarding his health otherwise it will not be ethically justifiable to reveal the information. In instances where the patient might be faced with potential harm relating to the diagnosis, the health care personnel should encourage the patient to share the information with the family members especially the spouse. It will help the spouse and other family members to give the necessary support geared towards patient recovery.

Conclusion

Medical confidentiality should be upheld so as to promote trust between patient and their healthcare personnel. To receive optimum care, a patient should feel free to disclose all the health information to their physician. On the other hand, the physician should use the information obtained in providing appropriate medical care and should not reveal it without the consent from the patient. In the case of breach of medical confidentiality, health care professionals' bodies usually have a penalty subjected to the errant personnel. Therefore, medical confidentiality is an integral part of health care that needs to be guarded.

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