

Guidance on receiving, recording and acting on information about a patient supplied by a third party (for example family, friends or carers)

Introduction

Friends, relatives and other people sometimes contact practices to raise concerns about the health of registered patients. Experience in West Yorkshire is that reception, administrative and clinical staff are sometimes uncertain how to respond to these contacts and there is confusion about where patient confidentiality fits in. This guidance is intended to clarify these issues for practices in order to ensure that clinicians are made aware in a timely way of information which may alter their assessment or treatment of patients.

General Medical Council guidance

The GMC has some helpful guidance about this issue for doctors:

“If anyone close to the patient wants to discuss their concerns about the patient’s health, you should make it clear to them that, while it is not a breach of confidentiality to listen to their concerns, you cannot guarantee that you will not tell the patient about the conversation.

You might need to share with the patient information that you have received from others, for example if it has influenced your assessment and treatment of the patient.

You should not refuse to listen to a patient’s partner, carers or others on the basis of confidentiality. Their views or the information they provide might be helpful in your care of the patient.

You will, though, need to consider whether your patient would consider you listening to the concerns of others about your patient’s health or care to be a breach of trust, particularly if they have asked you not to listen to particular people.”

Guidance for reception and administrative staff

If a third party contacts the practice to discuss a patient’s health or give information about a patient it can be difficult to know how to proceed.

Patient confidentiality means that you can receive information about a patient from someone other than the patient but you almost always cannot share information about the patient with someone else without the patient’s consent.

If information is passed to you about a patient registered at the practice you should establish and record in the patient's medical record (without acknowledging that the patient is registered at the practice or giving any information about the patient):

- the contact details of the informant;
- the time and date the information was passed to you;
- whom the informant wishes the information to be passed on to;
- what response if any the informant is expecting.

You should let the informant know that the information will be directed to a suitable clinician in the practice team to decide what if any further action is required.

You should assess the urgency of the information and then pass all the details you have recorded to the most appropriate clinician in the practice team in a timely way depending on the apparent urgency. Always seek advice from a senior colleague if you are in any doubt about where to direct the information or how urgently to do so.

Guidance for clinical staff

You should assess the information provided and decide what if any further action is required in the light of GMC guidance. Any information shared with you in relation to a patient should be recorded in the patient's medical record together with your decision about any action required as a result and whether the patient has been made aware of the information being provided.

If further advice is needed it should be sought from the Caldicott guardian for your practice or your indemnity provider.

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