

For patient advice, support and information please contact:
Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)
Email: pals@dhuft.nhs.uk
Tel: 0800 587 4997

For further advice and support regarding caring please contact:
carersupport@dhuft.nhs.uk

This project has been co-produced with carers and people who access services.



The information in this leaflet is available in additional languages and alternative formats. Please contact the Trust for further details.

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Dorset HealthCare 
University NHS Foundation Trust

Common sense confidentiality

Information for carers and staff



At Dorset HealthCare we define a carer as 'a person who provides unpaid help and support to a partner, child, relative or friend who could not manage without this help'.

We recognise that sharing information with you is vital to the care and treatment of the person you care for. This guide has been prepared to assist people who are caring for or supporting their partners, friends or relatives. Its aim is to help you understand what confidentiality means for the Trust, its staff, the person you are caring for and you as a carer.

Sharing Information

When consent is given

This means the person you are caring for has agreed to your involvement and is happy for us to share information with you about their care and treatment. You can expect to receive information about the person's illness that will help you to support them, help to understand the treatment plan and its aims, take an active role in planning care, and receive a copy of the care plan and other relevant documentation.

Without consent

There may be some exceptions where information needs to be shared without consent or against the wishes of the person you are caring for. This will only happen after careful consideration of the situation and the degree of risk. Examples include if there is a risk of serious harm or crime to self or others, an emergency situation in which the patient or carer is involved or following a request for information required by law e.g. a court order. Staff will only share the minimum amount required on a 'need to know' basis. The care team will explain to the person you are caring for clearly and fully the reasons why this was necessary and a note will be made in the clinical record.

When consent is refused

If the patient does not give permission to the care team sharing information staff can work with the patient to reduce any concerns they have, help them understand the benefits of sharing information and find out if they can reach a compromise. If still not willing to give consent staff can give you general information and support you in your caring role. You are always entitled to give your views to staff and your right to confidentiality will be respected. The care team can talk to you about what you already know about the person.

When consent cannot be given

In some circumstances a person may lack the capacity to understand and make decisions about the sharing of their personal information. In these circumstances, staff may disclose information about the patient only when it's in their best interest to do so or when there is a lawful reason such as the presence of a registered Lasting Power of Attorney. Our staff will take into account any previous views or wishes the person you are caring for has expressed. We will work with you to decide on an appropriate level of information sharing, ensuring the care of the person you are caring for remains paramount.

Good Practice Guidelines

Carers are given general information, both verbal and written about:

- The diagnosis
- The symptoms and behaviours that are likely to occur, and how best to support the person
- Medication - the benefits and possible side effects
- Local inpatient and community services
- The Care Programme Approach (mental health)
- Local and national support groups

Carers are helped to understand:

- The present situation
- Any confidentiality restrictions requested by the person you are caring for
- The treatment plan and its aims
- Any written care plan, crisis plan or recovery programme
- The role of each profession involved
- How to access help, including out-of-hours services

Carers are given:

- The opportunity to see a professional on their own
- The right to their own confidentiality when talking to a professional
- Encouragement to feel a valued member of the care team
- Confidence to voice their views or any concerns they may have
- Emotional and practical support
- An assessment of their own needs with their own care plan if the person they are caring for has a serious illness