Telephone Guidance- Outgoing calls to Patients

Principles of Confidentiality to apply to all telephone conversations

Table of Contents

1. General Guidance  
2. Anonymous Call Reject Service  
3. The Possible Dangers Of Leaving Messages  
4. Please do not mention the hospital or leave any clinical information  
5. Sharing Patient Information with Staff/External Agencies?  
6. Providing a Confidential Service  
7. Information Governance Contact Details

1. General Guidance

- A patient has a right to privacy so we must talk to the patient, unless we have a justified reason to speak to someone on their behalf, e.g. they have given their consent or it is in their best interests.
- Avoid “alarmist” language such as ‘it’s confidential’ or jargon like ‘fast track’.
- If you think you may need to contact the patient by phone, ask if you can call them at work, at home or on a mobile.
- Ask if you can leave messages
- If you know the patient is unable to speak to you, or the recipient of the call tells you that they effectively act on the patient’s behalf, then you can pass limited information to the recipient.

2. Anonymous Call Reject Services

Many telephone providers offer additional services to their customers, one is the ability to prevent calls being made by anonymous organisations.

If you call a patient or member of staff and you get a “number unknown” or “Unable to connect your call” they may have activated this service. If this happens phone switchboard on 0 and ask for an alternative line to call the patient.

3. The Possible Dangers of Leaving Messages

- If you leave an answer phone message that the patient may not be the first to hear
- Who might hear the message?
- Are you sure you have called the correct number?
- Will the recipient fully understand the content of the message?
- How can you be certain the message has even been picked up?
- You may inadvertently breach patient confidentiality

Please Do Not Mention the Hospital or Leave Any Clinical Information

Unless you can guarantee that the message will be delivered to and received by the correct patient then do not leave a message.

4. Sharing Patient Information with Staff/External Agencies?
Before contacting staff in other areas of the Trust or those in external agencies always ensure you:

- Have the consent of the patient – if required - to share their information
- Have checked the identity of the person you are calling before sharing the information
- Limit the amount of personal information disclosed. Information should be shared on a “need to know basis”.
- Are not being overheard while giving clinical information

5. Providing a Confidential Service

**Protect** patient information

**Inform** patients of how their information is used

**Provide choice** to the patient to decide whether their information can be disclosed or used in particular ways.

6. Information Governance Team Contact Details

For further information, please contact Information Governance Team on extension 2816 or 4133