

CEDARVILLE TOWNSHIP VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT
Policy on Security, Levels of Access and Limiting Disclosure and Use of PHI

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to outline levels of access to Protected Health Information (PHI) of various personnel of the Cedarville Township Volunteer Fire Department and to provide a policy and procedure on limiting access, disclosure, and use of PHI. Security of PHI is all members' responsibility.

Policy

Cedarville Township Volunteer Fire Department retains strict requirements on the security, access, disclosure and use of PHI. Access, disclosure and use of PHI will be based on the role of the individual in the organization, and should be only to the extent that the person needs access to PHI to complete necessary job functions.

When PHI is accessed, disclosed and used, the individuals involved will make every effort, except in patient care situations, to only access, disclose and use PHI to the extent that only the minimum necessary information is used to accomplish the intended purpose.

Procedure

Access

Access to PHI will be limited to those who need to access PHI to carry out their duties. The following describes the specific categories or types PHI to which such persons need access is defined and the conditions, as appropriate, that would apply to such access.

Firefighters, Students, Trainees, First Responder, EMT –B, I, P: May have access to PHI in the form of patient care reports and paper work used to create the patient care report. May access only as part of completion of a patient event and post-event activities and only while actually on duty.

Chief, Assistant Chief, EMS Captain, EMS Lieutenant, EMS Sergeant, Privacy Officer: May access PHI to the extent necessary to monitor compliance and accomplish appropriate supervision and management of personnel. May access all PHI, in all forms, at any time necessary and for the extent necessary for management of department and personnel as well as for quality assurance checks and corrective counseling of personnel.

Training Coordinator / QA/QI Staff: May access PHI in the form of patient care reports. May access as a part of training and quality assurance activities. All individually identifiable patient information should be redacted prior to use in training and quality assurance activities.

Billing Person: May access patient care reports, billing claim forms, remittance advice statements, other patient records needed. May access only as part of duties to complete patient billing and follow up and only during actual work time.

Access to a patient's entire file will not be allowed except when provided for in this and other policies and procedures and the justification for use of the entire medical record is specifically identified and documented.

Disclosures to and Authorizations from the Patient

You are not required to limit the minimum amount of information necessary required to perform your job function, or your disclosures of PHI to patients who are the subject of the PHI. In addition, disclosures authorized by the patient are exempt from minimum necessary requirements unless the authorization to disclose PHI is required by Cedarville Township.

Authorizations received directly from third parties, such as Medicare, or other insurance companies, which direct you to release PHI to those entities are not subject to the minimum necessary standards.

Cedarville Township Requests for PHI

If Cedarville Township needs to request PHI from another health care provider on routine or recurring basis, we must limit our requests to only the reasonably necessary information needed for the intended purpose, as described below. For requests not covered below, a determination must be made individually for each request and you should contact your supervisor for guidance.

Skilled Nursing Facilities: PHI may be requested to have adequate patient records to determine medical necessity for service, to determine medical care and treatment needed, and to properly bill for services provided. Information that may be reasonably necessary to accomplish this purpose would be; patient face sheets, discharge summaries, physician certification statements and statements of medical necessity, medication / allergy lists, treatment / vital sign sheet, and advance directives paperwork.

Hospitals: PHI may be requested to have adequate patient records to determine medical necessity for service and to properly bill for services provided. Information that may be reasonably necessary to accomplish this purpose would be; patient face sheets, discharge summaries, physician certification statements and statements of medical necessity.

Mutual Aid Ambulance or Paramedic Services: PHI may be requested to have adequate patient records to treat and/or to conduct joint billing operations for patients mutually treated / transported by Cedarville Township. Information that may be reasonably necessary to accomplish this purpose would be patient care reports.

For all other requests, determine what information is reasonably necessary for each on an individual basis.

Incidental Disclosures

Cedarville Township understands that there will be times when there are incidental disclosures about PHI in the context of caring for a patient. The privacy laws were not intended to impede common health care practices that are essential in providing health care to the individual. Incidental disclosures are inevitable, but these will typically occur in radio or face-to-face conversation between health care providers, or when patient care information in written or computer form is left out in the open for others to access or see.

The fundamental principle is that all staff needs to be sensitive about the importance of maintaining confidentiality and security of all material we create or use that contains patient care information. Personnel should not have access to information that is not necessary for completion of his/her job.

All personnel must be sensitive to avoiding incidental disclosures to other health care providers and others who do not have a need to know the information. Pay attention to who is within earshot when you make verbal statements about a patient's health information, and follow some of these common sense procedures for avoiding accidental or inadvertent disclosures:

Verbal Security: If patients are in a public area, bring patient into a private area before engaging in discussion. Personnel should only discuss patient care information with those who are involved in the care of the patient, regardless of your physical location. You should be sensitive to your level of voice and to the fact that others may be in the area when you are speaking. This approach is not meant to impede anyone's ability to speak with other health care providers freely when engaged in the care of the patient. When it comes to treatment of the patient, you should be free to discuss all aspects of the patient's medical condition, treatment provided, and any of their health information you may have in your possession with others involved in the care of the patient.

Physical Security: Patient care reports should be stored in safe and secure areas. When any paper records concerning a patient are completed, they should not be left in open bins or on desktops or other surfaces. Only those with a need to have the information for the completion of their job duties should have access to any paper records.

Billing records, including all notes, remittance advises, charge slips or claim forms should not be left out on the open and should be stored in files or boxes that are secure and in an area with access limited to those who need access to the information for the completion of their job duties.

Computer and Entry Devices: Computer access terminals and other remote entry devices should be kept secure. Access to any computer device should be by password only. Personnel should be sensitive to who may be in viewing range of the monitor screen and take simple steps to shield viewing of the screen by unauthorized persons. All remote devices should remain in the physical possession of the individual to whom it is assigned at all times. See Cedarville Township Volunteer Fire Department Policy on Use of Computer Equipment & Information Systems.