

## **Confidentiality** is central to trust between doctors and patients.

Without assurances about confidentiality, patients may be reluctant to seek medical attention or to give doctors the information they need in order to provide good care.

Go to  
**[www.gmc-uk.org/confidentiality](http://www.gmc-uk.org/confidentiality)**  
for more information  
and advice.



### **Statutory power to advise**

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Medical Act 1983 (amended) gives us the power:

- 'To give advice to the profession on standards of professional conduct, professional performance and on medical ethics, as the Council think fit.'



## Hippocrates

All that may come to my knowledge in the exercise of my profession or in daily commerce with men, which ought not to be spread abroad, I will keep secret and will never reveal.

5<sup>th</sup> Century BC

## **Principles**

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Confidentiality is central to trust between doctors and patients. Without assurances about confidentiality, patients may be reluctant to seek medical attention or to give doctors the information they need in order to provide good care.

But appropriate information sharing is essential to the efficient provision of safe, effective care, both for the individual patient and for the wider community of patients.

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## **Balance**

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What are the exceptions to the general duty?

In particular, how can doctors decide if the public interest in disclosure of a patient's personal information outweighs both the public interest and the patients' interest in a confidential health service?

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## Dilemmas

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- Should the police be informed when a patient presents with a gunshot or knife wound, even if they object to disclosure?
- In research, how difficult must it be to get patients' consent before it's acceptable to disclose without it?
- If a patient has a STI and won't tell their sexual partner, should their doctor do so?

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## Summary

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1. A framework of principles within which doctors can exercise professional judgement
2. To help identify the relevant legal and ethical considerations, and to help doctors make decisions that respect patients' privacy, autonomy and choices and that also benefit the wider community of patients and the public
3. Emphasis remains firmly on anonymising or coding data, or getting patients' consent for disclosures of identifiable information, whenever practicable.

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## What's new?

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Serious or persistent failure to follow this guidance will put your registration at risk.

New guidance on:

- shared genetic information
- information sharing with patients' families, partners and carers

A new, clearer approach to:

- research and other secondary uses
- disclosures to protect the patient and others from risks of serious harm.

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## Supplementary guidance

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1. Reporting concerns about patients to the DVLA
2. Disclosing records for financial and administrative purposes
3. Reporting gunshot and knife wounds
4. **Disclosing information about serious communicable diseases**
5. Disclosing information for insurance, employment and similar purposes
6. Disclosing information for education and training purposes
7. Responding to criticism in the press.

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## **Serious communicable diseases**

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1. Healthcare workers with an SCD
2. Information for patients and sharing their information for purposes of their care
3. Informing sexual contacts
4. Children and young people
5. Injuries to healthcare workers and others
6. Recording SCDs on death certificates
7. Disease control and surveillance

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