Information Management in an Electronic Age
April 2007

ACTION for Health

Document Status:
☐ Published Paper  ☐ Practitioner’s Pointers
☐ Working Paper  ☐ Briefing Note
☐ Report  ☐ Research Tool
☐ Draft  ☐ Overview
☒ Presentation  ☐ Other

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Information Management in an Electronic Age

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Presentation at IDEALS Congress
Toronto, Ontario April 2007
Overview

- Duty of Confidentiality: Law and Ethics
- Right of Access
- Consensual Release
- Non-Consensual Release
- Electronic Patient Records
  - Better protection
  - Worse protection
  - Loss of privacy
Nature of Personal Health Information

- Worthy of highest protection
- Varying degrees of sensitivity
- Sensitivity context-specific
Duty of Confidentiality: Ethics

- **American Dental Association:**
  
  “Dentists are obliged to safeguard the confidentiality of patient records.”

- **Canadian Dental Association:**
  
  “Patient information acquired in the practice of dentistry, shall be kept in strict confidence except as required by law.”


Duty of Confidentiality: Law


“Nobody would dispute that a secret...is the secret of the patient, and, normally, is under his control, and not under that of the doctor. Prima facie, the patient has the right to require that the secret shall not be divulged; and that right is absolute, unless there is some paramount reason which overrides it.”

Supreme Court of Canada 1928
“Information provided by a patient to a dentist can be every bit as sensitive as that provided to a physician. In my opinion, the same principles apply to the treatment of dental charts and records as apply to the treatment of medical records of physicians.”

Ontario Court (General Division) 1993
Recourse in Law

- Professional discipline
- Breach of fiduciary duty
- Contractual breach
- Legislation
Consensual Release: Patient’s Right of Access

- Dental Board of Queensland:
  “Patients have a general right of access to their own health records.”

- Canadian Dental Association:
  “Such records or reports of clinical information must be released to the patient or to whomever the patient directs, when requested by the patient.”
Consensual Release: To Other Healthcare Providers

- Consent often presumed
- For therapeutic purposes only
- Safer to get actual consent
Consensual Release: To Surrogate Decision-Maker

- Steps into shoes of patient
- Only in case of incapacity
Consensual Release: To Other Third Parties

- With consent of patient/surrogate
- Preferably in writing
Non-Consensual Release for the Patient’s Sake

- In best interests of the patient?
- Emergency
- Adult protection
- Narcotics reporting
Non-Consensual Release in Others’ Interest

- Child abuse
- Prevention of harm to others
- Infectious disease
- Adverse drug reaction
Release for Legal Proceedings

- Civil action
- Subpoena
- Search warrant
- Discipline
- Bankruptcy
Electronic Health Records

- Better protection
- Worse protection
- Loss of privacy
Electronic Health Records: Definition

- “An electronic health record provides a ‘collection of personal health information of a single individual, entered or accepted by health care providers and stored electronically.’ Data are entered on individuals’ personal health records every time they visit their physician, have a prescription filled, have a lab test, or go to the hospital.” Romanow Commission
Better Protection

- Security measures
- Record of access and by whom
- Potential for removal of direct identifiers and anonymization
REGINA POLICE LAUNCH DATA HUNT
Worse Protection

- Informational value
- Multiple points of access
- Views of desktop computer
- Laptop transportability
- Information theft
- Breadth of potential breach
Loss of Privacy

- Confidentiality: Responsibility to safeguard the information entrusted by another

- Privacy: Involves self – territorial/spatial, physical, informational - right to make decisions regarding uses of information
Secondary Uses

- Use of health information for non-individually-therapeutic purposes
- Examples: billing, quality control, research/surveillance, insurance, employment, criminal
Secondary Uses

- Standard rapidly changes
- Anonymity is relative concept
- Little guidance in law
- Linkage of databases
Practical Measures

- Consent where not impracticable
- Collect/use/disclose only minimum info necessary for purpose
- Information as anonymised as possible
- Heightened caution if databases linked
- Aggregate where possible
- Rigorous security measures
- Training of employees
- Oaths of confidentiality
Quaere: Are electronic health records a positive step? At what cost?
Questions/Comments?

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