
Confidentiality Exercise: Radiology and Nursing focus

Directions: Have students break into groups of four to five to discuss the situation. Assign one student to be group leader, one to be recorder and one to report to the large group. Have the recorder make a list of the issues that come up in the discussion that have not been listed in the situation.

Scenario: You are working the weekend shift in Radiology and are assigned to the emergency department. You are preparing to perform an abdominal series on a 22 year-old woman who came to the emergency room with abdominal pain. You recognize her as the daughter of one of the radiology staff. In completing the assessment form, you routinely ask the patient the date of her last menstrual period and she says two months ago. You ask if there is a chance that she may be pregnant. She begins to cry and tells you to please not tell anyone that she had an abortion a week ago. You calm her and complete the examination and then have her wait in the waiting area.

The standard procedure in this department is to leave the x-rays on the view box in the hallway for the physician to read. You are concerned about maintaining the patient's confidentiality since she is known in the agency. You are concerned that leaving the x-rays on the view box labeled with her name may be a breach of confidentiality.

- What are the significant considerations at this point for the radiology technician? What are the significant considerations if this communication was shared with the nurse?
- What options are there other than placing the films on the view box?
- What information must the radiology technician report? Is this any different from the information that the nurse must report? Why or why not?
- What does the law about *confidentiality* require you to do?
- If the other staff becomes aware of the information, what obligations do they have to keep the information confidential?
- What would you do if you heard others discussing the situation in the lounge?

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Answer Key: These responses constitute a guide for discussion. It is important to facilitate open dialogue among all the participants in the discussion and to consider all responses.

- What are the significant considerations at this point for the radiology technician? What are the significant considerations if this communication was shared with the nurse?

The major consideration in this situation is the requirement for the radiologic technician to maintain confidentiality of the patient while providing competent and sensitive care according to protocol. If the films are placed on the view box, they are in full view of the other staff; however the identification markers are small and may not be seen. Inputting the information into the computer will give full access to the data by all staff and secretaries.

If this information was shared with the nurse, the same requirement exists to protect the confidentiality of the patient. However, the history of recent abortion for this patient is significant in dealing with her chief complaint of abdominal pain due to the potential complications of this procedure. (infection, concealed bleeding, perforation, retained products of conception) This information must be communicated to the physician immediately.

- What options are there other than placing the films on the view box?

The radiology technician has the option of bringing the films directly to the radiologist for review and explaining the situation.

- What information must the radiology technician report? Is this any different from the information that the nurse must report? Why or why not?

The radiologic technician must report all significant data in the situation. The recent abortion reported by the patient is significant historical data that may impact the patient's medical problems.

- What does the law about confidentiality require you to do?

(See page 37-Objective 2-A) The law about confidentiality requires the health care provider to assure the patient's right to privacy in matters of their health care. In this situation, it prohibits the release of information to unauthorized persons or more significantly, the disclosure of information to family members without consent of the patient.

- If the other staff becomes aware of the information, what obligations do they have to keep the information confidential?

If other staff becomes aware of the information they have the same requirement to keep the information confidential.

- What would you do if you heard others discussing the situation in the lounge?

The staff lounge is not an appropriate place to discuss such a situation, nor do the others not directly involved in the case have a right to the information. (See pg. 37 – Objective 2-B)

The responses by the participants will vary depending on their prior experience, culture, communication style and fear of repercussions. Consider all responses by the participants in this question.