

Information about you

When you come to hospital we ask you for a lot of information about yourself. This leaflet tells you how we use the information and where to find out more about this subject.

1 We need information about you in order to treat you properly

Health care professionals need to find out as much as possible about your physical condition to help them provide the best treatment for you.

We are very careful to respect your privacy. Personal information about you is safeguarded, for example we control computer access to information about patients; and keep all patient records secure. Staff come across personal information in carrying out their work, but are contractually and ethically bound to maintain confidentiality.

We pass on information about you and your treatment on a “need to know” basis only to other health and care professionals - for example, so that we can keep your GP informed of the progress of your treatment. Before we send information to other people / organisations, we always check that this is really necessary. If you have reasons why you do not wish us to share information about you, please let us know.

2 The health service needs information about patients for planning and research purposes

As a health service organisation, we need administrative details about you. We produce reports about our work for the Department of Health and NHS organisations – for example, information about ethnic category allows us to monitor access to our services. In these reports, we remove names and addresses where possible.

Auditors checking the work of the trust are allowed by law to look at patient records, but must keep details private.

In general, you have to consent for your personal information to be used for anything other than these normal NHS purposes. For instance, researchers undertaking authorised studies look at patient records, but are not allowed to keep personal details of patients without their permission.

However, some people can legally demand to see health records without patients’ consent – for example, because of a court order.

We do our best to keep information about you accurate, but need your help. Details can change and this is why we ask for confirmation of your address and GP at each visit, please tell us if you think our records about you are out of date.

3 Protecting your information

The Data Protection Act 1998 protects the use of personal information. The Act applies to personal information about you held by public authorities. In most cases, organisations need your consent to process your personal information.

The trust has a duty to maintain confidentiality where information is provided to us in confidence. We will ensure that our staff are aware of the seriousness of maintaining confidentiality and that such information will only be seen by those who need to see it. Under the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Act 2003, it is an offence for our staff to knowingly or recklessly disclose confidential personal information.

Keeping your medical records secure also means ensuring that only the key staff who are involved with the delivery of your healthcare can access your records. There has to be a “need to know” for staff to be granted this access. Appropriate staff are issued with a “smart card” and unique pin number, very similar to a credit card or bank card, which only allows them the access they need in order to carry out their job. The staff member has to insert the card into the computer keyboard and then enter the correct access code to gain access to your information.

4 Access to medical records – your rights

The Data Protection Act 1998 allows you to find out what personal information the trust holds about you, subject to certain exemptions.

The Act gives you rights including:

- The right to find out what information is held about you
- The right to be given a copy of the information
- The right to disagree with any personal information we hold about you and the right to have inserted into those records a note of what you think is the correct information

If you would like to see information that we hold about you, please try to tell us exactly what information you want. Applications should be made in the first instance to the medical records department where forms are available, and the department will arrange access as appropriate, a processing fee may be applicable.

**Medical Records Department, Royal Free Hampstead NHS Trust, Pond Street,
London, NW3 2QG
Tel: 020 7472 6125**

5 If you want to know more

If you want to know more about why we keep information about you and what we do with it, please write to the trust’s Caldicott Guardian, Royal Free Hospital, Pond Street, London NW3 2QG.

If you have other comments or enquiries you can contact the trust’s Senior Information Risk Owner at the same address.

6 Useful website links

For the current version of the NHS confidentiality code of practice - www.dh.gov.uk/assetRoot/04/06/92/54/04069254.pdf

For advice about data protection see the Information Commissioner’s Office website - www.ico.gov.uk