

## Frequently Asked Questions



### Your Privacy is Important to US

The Middlesex Hospital Alliance respects the privacy of your personal health information. The following is a list of questions that we frequently get asked. If you have other questions or concerns, please contact the Privacy Office.

#### **Privacy Office Contact Information:**

**Email** [Lorraine.craig@mha.tvh.ca](mailto:Lorraine.craig@mha.tvh.ca)

**Phone:**

**SMGH – 519 245 5295 ext 5529**

**FCHS – 519 693 7111 ext 5529**

#### **What information does the hospital collect?**

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The hospital collects both personal and personal health information. Information like your legal name, date of birth, address, Health Card Number and extended health insurance numbers are examples of personal information. Information relating to previous health problems, the record of your visits to the hospital and what health care we provide to you during those visits are examples of your health information.

#### **Why does the hospital need this information?**

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#### **The information we collect from you is used:**

- To provide you with quality health care and follow-up care in the community. We need your information to make sure we can make the appropriate diagnosis and provide treatment.
- To disclose very limited information to family and friends who may call, for example to find out what room you are in. We may provide generalized condition reports such as “good, fair, serious or critical” to other individuals who are not immediate family. If you do not wish your name to be included in the Patient Directory, please notify Patient Registration when you arrive or inform your healthcare provider. This would mean that if anyone called in asking about you, they would be informed that we have no one by that name.
- To carry out quality assurance to help make us better. By reviewing the care we provide to patients we can determine what strategies are most successful.
- To ask you how we are doing. You may be asked to participate in surveys by either the hospital or by specific programs or departments in the hospital that participated in your care.

- To comply with the law. There are Mandatory laws which require the hospital to turn over your personal health information. We also use your information to obtain funding for health services from the Ministry of Health.
- For fundraising. Your contact information, for example, your name and address are provided to the hospitals' Foundation so they may contact you to see if you wish to make a donation. Donations by our patients and members of the community raise money for equipment and facilities to provide you with the most modern health care services. The hospital does not provide names of patients who have certain more sensitive procedures or diagnoses to the Foundation. Your personal health information, for example, your diagnosis or treatment, is not disclosed to the Foundation.
- For education to keep existing health care practitioners up-to-date, and to train new health care practitioners for the future. The hospital is associated with educational institutions that train health care professionals.

### **How do the hospitals protect my information?**

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**A few of the ways that the hospitals strive to protect both your personal information and your personal health information are by:**

- Educating our staff, physicians, volunteers and students on your privacy rights and the importance of maintaining confidentiality.
- Requiring that all staff wear photo identification at all times while on hospital property to protect against unauthorized individuals accessing information.
- Applying additional security measures to all electronic health records; for example, user names and passwords, firewall, antivirus software and encryption.
- Locked doors.
- Security personnel.

**Does the hospital share my information with anyone?**

**We share some or all of your information with:**

- Health care providers at other hospitals, nursing homes or other health care agencies who become part of your health care team. Information is shared for the purpose of your continuing care in the community.
- Agencies that fund the hospitals, for example OHIP, extended health insurance companies, Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, Ministry of Health.
- Other agencies as required by law, for example, public health surveillance.
- Click on [www.swodin.ca](http://www.swodin.ca) to learn more on whom we share your information with.

### **Do I have to participate in fundraising, research, teaching and surveys?**

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- The Strathroy Middlesex General Hospital Foundation and the Four Counties Health Services Foundation have worked for many years to raise funds for vitally needed equipment to provide the community with quality health care. Without the generosity of our donors, we would not have these services. Participation in

fundraising is not mandatory. Contact the Privacy Office to request that your name be removed from our fundraising contact list (when leaving a phone message provide your date of birth, full name, spell your last name.)

- The Middlesex Hospital Alliance may provide health information for the purpose of research. Researchers may access this information only after the hospital removes identifying personal information, for example, names, and addresses. Other research methods, such as clinical trials or clinical investigation that may have a direct impact on your care, requires your specific permission. A member of your health care team may ask your permission for a researcher, who is affiliated with the hospital, to approach you about a clinical research trial. If you agree, the researcher would provide you with information about the research and ask if you would like to participate. Many research projects give participants access to new treatments and technologies. You are under no obligation to participate in this type of research, and you can refuse when asked. The care you receive will not be impacted in any way if you decline.
- The hospital provides clinical experience for student physicians, nurses and a variety of other health care professionals. The students are constantly under the direction of a licensed practitioner. If you have concerns about the participation of students in your care, please speak to your physician or Leader in the area where you are receiving your care.
- Surveys help the hospital by allowing us to get your opinion on the care and services you receive as a patient. Participation in the surveys is not mandatory and you can decline participation and/or request to be removed from the hospitals' survey list.

### **Will the hospital disclose my health information to outside companies or to my employer?**

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The hospital requires your written permission or a court order to disclose health information to any organization or person not directly involved with the provision of patient care.

### **Where is my health information stored and for how long?**

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Hospitals are required to keep health records for at least 10 years past the date of discharge. In some cases, for example health records for children and records maintained for the purpose of research, are kept for much longer. Most health records are maintained in the Health Record Services Department, but some departments, including Diagnostic Imaging and Laboratories, maintain their own specific records.

### **How do I access or request a copy of my health information?**

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- Ask your health care provider for information about your diagnosis and treatment while you are a patient at the hospital.
- To obtain a copy of, or view your Strathroy Middlesex General Hospital or Four Counties Health Services health record, please contact the Health Records

Department. You will need to complete a Consent for Access or Disclosure of Personal Health Information form.

- You have the right to access your personal health record and the hospital has an obligation to make it available to you with limited exceptions. If disclosing your information would put yourself or a third-party at risk, the hospital has a legal right to choose not to disclose some or all of that information.

### **What if some of the information in my health record is incorrect?**

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Please see How Do I Correct My Personal Health Information section.

### **Can my family see my health information?**

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Although you have the right to access your health record, this right does not automatically extend to family members and/or friends. If you consent to let a friend or family member see your record, then the friend/family member may access the part(s) that you have consented to let them see.

### **What if I am unable to give consent to release my health information?**

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If you are unable to give consent for a friend or family member to access your health information due to reasons such as competency or consciousness, the consent decision falls to the appointed substitute decision maker, such as a spouse, parent or guardian.

### **Will my family and friends be able to call in to get information about me over the phone?**

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When someone calls the hospital, the staff has no way to verify who is calling and what their relationship is to you. To comply with privacy law, the caller must provide your name, to allow the disclosure of a minimum amount of information, such as, your presence or absence in the organization, your location in the organization and your general state of health (good, fair, critical etc). No other information i.e. diagnosis or treatment information is disclosed.

### **Can all hospital staff access my health information?**

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The only persons whom the hospital authorizes to access a patient record are the staff and physicians involved in a patient's care, or staff who need information from a patient record to conduct the business of the hospital, e.g., the Finance department staff that send a bill to a patient's extended health insurance company.

All staff and hospital affiliates have been Privacy educated and have signed Confidentiality Agreements. They are also bound by hospital policies and practices related to Privacy and Confidentiality. These policies aim to ensure that staff only access information on a need-to-know basis. Regulated Health Professionals are also bound by privacy and confidentiality requirements from their professional Colleges.

### **Can I find out who has viewed my hospital record?**

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Yes. If you have concerns about unauthorized personnel accessing your information, you can make a request to the Privacy Office to audit your electronic hospital record. An audit is a process that tracks every staff or physician who has accessed your electronic record by date and time. We can perform an audit on your electronic health record and a limited audit on your hardcopy health record. We will ensure that your concerns are investigated promptly and a response is provided to you in a timely manner. If you would like to request an audit please contact the Privacy Office. You will be asked to verify your identity by providing a government-issued ID that has your signature.

### **I have noticed that many areas of the hospital are open and I can sometimes overhear staff talking to patients and family about health information. Is this not a breach of patient privacy?**

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Despite the pressures of an acute-care hospital setting, staff make every effort to discuss health information confidentially.

### **Can my family physician access my health information?**

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The Middlesex Hospital Alliance discloses certain information, for example, inpatient discharge summaries, Emergency Department records, to family physicians to facilitate your continuing care. Other information can be disclosed to your family physician at your request and with your consent. If you do not want your family doctor to receive information, let Patient Registration or your health care provider know.

### **What if I have concerns about my privacy?**

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Please contact the Privacy Office if you have any questions or concerns.