

Confidentiality Policy

Church Street Dental Practice takes the need for strict confidentiality of personal information about patients very seriously. This document sets out our policy for maintaining confidentiality and all members of the dental team must comply with these safeguards as part of their contract of employment.

The relation between dentist and patient is based on the understanding that any information revealed by the patient will not be divulged without the patients consent. patients have the right to privacy and it is vital that they give the dentist full information regarding their medical history to ensure that the treatment is carried out safely. The intensely personal nature of this information means that many patients would be reluctant to provide this information to the dentist if they were not confident that it would not be passed on. If confidentiality is breached, the member of the dental team faces investigation by the General Dental Council with possible erasure from the register, and may face legal action for the breach of the Data Protection Act.

All staff must follow the General Dental Councils rules for maintaining patient confidentiality, contained in Standards of dental professional and principles of patient confidentiality.

If confidentiality is breached, each registered dental professional involved is responsible to the GDC for their individual conduct.

WHAT IS PERSONAL INFORMATION?

In dental context, personal information held by a practice about a patient includes:

- The patients Name, Address, Bank details, Contact Numbers, Email address and other means of personal information such as Medical History
- Information that the individual is or has been a patient of the practice or attended, cancelled or failed to attend and appointment
- Information concerning the patients physical, mental or oral health
- Information regarding the patients previous or planned treatment
- Information about patient's family members and personal information supplied by the patient to others
- All payment history including debts and direct debits

Church Street Dental Practice has adopted the following three principles of confidentiality, personal information about a patient:

- Is confidential in respect of the patient and to those providing the patient with health care
- Should only be disclosed to those who would be unable to provide effective care and treatment without that information
- Such information should not be disclosed to third parties without the consent of the patient except in certain specific circumstances described in this policy

DISCLOSURES TO THIRD PARTIES

There are certain restricted circumstances in which a dentist may decide to disclose information to a third party or may be required to disclose by law. Responsibility for disclosure rests with the patient's dentist and under no circumstances can any other member of staff make a decision to disclose.

There are certain circumstances where a wider public interest outweighs the rights of the patient to confidentiality.

WHEN DISCLOSURE CAN BE MADE

- Where the patient has expressly given consent to the disclosure
- Where disclosure is necessary for the purpose of enabling someone else to provide health care to patient and the patient has consented to this sharing of information
- Where disclosure is required and ordered by a court of law
- Where disclosure is necessary for the dentist to pursue a legal claim against a patient, when disclosing to a solicitor, court or debt collecting agency may be necessary

Information may also be disclosed to third party organisations to ensure the provision of care and the proper functioning of the NHS. In practical terms, this type of disclosure means:

- Transmission of claims and information to payment authorities
- Referral of a patient to another dentist or health care provider such as a hospital

ACCESS TO RECORDS

Patients have the right of access to their health records held on paper or computer. A request from the patient to see records or a copy must be referred to the patient's dentist. The patient should be given the opportunity of coming in to the practice to discuss their records and will then be given a print out. Care should be taken to ensure that the individual seeking access is the patient, their identity must be confirmed before any information is given.

PRACTICAL RULES

The principles of confidentiality give rise to a number of practice rules that everyone in the practice must observe:

- Records must be kept secure and, in a location, where it is not possible for other patients or individuals to read.
- Identifiable information about patients must not be discussed with anyone outside of the practice, including friends or relatives
- A school should not be given information about whether a child attended for an appointment on a particular day
- When talking to a patient on the phone or in person in a public area, care should be taken to ensure that sensitive information is not overheard by other patients
- a patient's appointment information must not be provided to the patients' employer
- messages about a patient's healthcare must not be left with third parties or left on an answering machine, a message to contact the practice back is all that can be left
- disclosure of appointment books, records or other information must not be made to police officers or inland revenue officials unless upon the instructions of the dentist
- patients must not be able to see information of appointments on the computer screen or day lists
- discussions about patients must not take place in public areas of the practice

DISCIPLINARY ACTION

If after an investigation, a member of staff is found to have breached patient confidentiality or this policy, he or she will be liable to dismissal in accordance with the practice disciplinary policy.

Employees are reminded that all personal data processed at the practice must by law remain confidential after employment has terminated. It is an offence under the Data Protection Act to knowingly and recklessly, without consent to obtain or disclose data.