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Professional Resources for Care, Catering & Hospitality

FREE PROFESSIONAL RESOURCE

Confidentiality and Information Sharing

A Practical Guide for Care Staff

Knowledge Hub Resource 044

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Introduction

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Confidentiality is a fundamental principle of health and social care. Every person receiving care has the right to expect that their personal information will be treated with respect, kept secure and only shared when there is a lawful and legitimate reason to do so.

Care staff regularly have access to sensitive information, including personal details, medical conditions, care plans and financial information. Maintaining confidentiality helps build trust, protects people's privacy and supports safe, high-quality, person-centred care.

There are occasions when information must be shared to protect an individual or others from harm, but this should always be done appropriately, lawfully and in line with your organisation's policies and procedures.

Why This Resource Matters

Understanding confidentiality and information sharing helps care staff to:

- Protect the privacy and dignity of the people they support.
 - Understand when personal information should and should not be shared.
 - Comply with legal and professional responsibilities, including UK data protection legislation.
 - Build trust with individuals, families and colleagues.
 - Support safe, effective and person-centred care.
 - Reduce the risk of confidentiality breaches and inappropriate information sharing.
 - Know when concerns should be reported to a manager.
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Key Message

Good confidentiality means protecting personal information while ensuring it is shared appropriately when necessary to support safe care or protect individuals from harm. Always treat information with respect, share it only with those who have a legitimate need to know and follow your organisation's policies and procedures.

Understanding Confidentiality and Information Sharing

Confidentiality means keeping personal information private and only sharing it with people who have a legitimate need to know. Everyone working in health and social care has a professional and legal responsibility to protect the information of the individuals they support.

Personal information may include:

- Name, address and date of birth.
- Medical conditions and health records.
- Care plans and risk assessments.
- Medication information.
- Financial or personal circumstances.
- Family or emergency contact details.

Information should always be handled securely, whether it is stored on paper, electronically or discussed with colleagues.

Sharing Information Appropriately

There are times when sharing information is necessary to provide safe and effective care. Information should only be shared:

- With authorised colleagues involved in the individual's care.
- With healthcare professionals who need the information to provide treatment or support.
- When the individual has given consent, where appropriate.
- When required by law.
- When sharing information is necessary to protect an individual or others from serious harm or abuse.

When sharing information, only provide the information that is necessary and always follow your organisation's policies and procedures.

Remember

Confidentiality is about protecting people's privacy while ensuring the right information is shared with the right people at the right time. Good information handling builds trust, supports safe person-centred care and helps protect the rights, dignity and wellbeing of every individual.

Professional Responsibilities

Every member of care staff has a responsibility to protect confidential information and handle it appropriately. Respecting confidentiality helps maintain trust, protects individuals' privacy and ensures compliance with legal and professional standards.

As a care professional, you should:

- Keep personal information secure at all times.
 - Only access information you need to carry out your role.
 - Share information only with authorised people who have a legitimate need to know.
 - Obtain consent before sharing information whenever appropriate.
 - Follow your organisation's confidentiality, information governance and data protection policies.
 - Store paper and electronic records securely.
 - Dispose of confidential information safely using approved procedures.
 - Report any actual or suspected confidentiality breaches immediately.
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When to Raise Concerns

You should speak to your manager if:

- You believe confidential information has been shared inappropriately.
- Personal records have been lost, accessed by unauthorised people or disclosed accidentally.
- You are unsure whether information should be shared.
- An individual raises concerns about how their personal information is being handled.
- You suspect a data breach or misuse of confidential information.
- You need advice about confidentiality, consent or information sharing.

Never guess whether information can be shared. If you are unsure, always seek advice before disclosing confidential information unless there is an immediate risk of serious harm that requires urgent action in line with your organisation's procedures.

Good Practice Reminder

Confidentiality is about respecting people's privacy while ensuring information is shared responsibly to support safe, effective care. By handling personal information securely, following legal requirements and organisational policies, and sharing information only when appropriate, you help protect individuals' rights, maintain trust and deliver high-quality person-centred care.

Summary

Confidentiality is a fundamental part of safe, professional and person-centred care. Every individual has the right to expect that their personal information will be treated with respect, stored securely and only shared when there is a lawful and legitimate reason to do so.

Care staff have a responsibility to protect confidential information, follow data protection and organisational policies, and ensure information is shared appropriately to support safe care and protect individuals from harm. Good confidentiality helps build trust, safeguards privacy and promotes high standards of professional practice.

Confidentiality and Information Sharing Checklist

- ✓ Keep personal information secure at all times.
 - ✓ Only access information needed for your role.
 - ✓ Share information only with authorised people who have a legitimate need to know.
 - ✓ Obtain consent before sharing information whenever appropriate.
 - ✓ Follow your organisation's confidentiality and data protection policies.
 - ✓ Store and dispose of confidential information securely.
 - ✓ Report any actual or suspected confidentiality breaches immediately.
 - ✓ Seek advice if you are unsure whether information should be shared.
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Further Information

For further guidance on confidentiality, information sharing and data protection, visit:

Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)

<https://ico.org.uk>

Care Quality Commission (CQC)

<https://www.cqc.org.uk>

NHS England – Confidentiality

<https://www.england.nhs.uk>

GOV.UK – UK GDPR and Data Protection

<https://www.gov.uk/data-protection>

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Related Knowledge Hub Resources

- Resource 026 – Record Keeping & Care Documentation – A Professional Awareness Guide for Care Staff
- Resource 037 – Consent to Care and Treatment – A Practical Guide for Care Staff
- Resource 042 – Mental Capacity Act (MCA) – A Practical Guide for Care Staff
- Resource 043 – Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) – A Practical Guide for Care Staff

Related FlexiLearnHub Courses

- GDPR & Data Protection Awareness
- Mental Capacity Act (MCA) & Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) Awareness
- Safeguarding Adults Awareness
- Duty of Care Awareness

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