

Confidentiality Policy

Laura Lynch's Dental Practice recognises that all members of the team have an ethical and legal duty to keep patient information confidential.

The relationship this practice has with each patient is based on trust that information will not be given to external persons or organisations without the patient's consent.

All members of the practice team are expected to comply with this policy and are advised to be aware of the confidentiality clause within their staff contract. Breaches of this policy could lead to dismissal.

'Standards for Dental Professionals', guidance from the General Dental Council, notes that practitioners must 'Protect the confidentiality of patients' information'.

This means:

- Using information only for the purposes for which it was given.
- Preventing information from being accidentally revealed.
- Preventing unauthorised access by keeping information secure at all times.

Only in exceptional circumstances can a breach of confidentiality be justified.

Preventing breaches of confidentiality

Keep all confidential data stored securely and do not allow them to be placed in areas where they may be seen by unauthorised personnel.

Do not provide information:

- To a school about a child's attendance.
- To employers about a patient's appointments.
- To third parties about appointments or leave answering machines. Only leave messages to return the practice's phone call.

Recall cards and other personal information must be sent in a sealed envelope and marked 'Confidential – to be opened by addressee only'.

Disclosure of information

If it is necessary to release information about a patient:

- Get the patient's consent first, where possible. Make sure they understand what information you will release, why and any likely consequences.
- Release the minimum required.
- Be prepared to justify your decisions and follow on action.

If you are using patient information (eg radiographs, study models) for teaching purposes gain the patient's consent and ensure the patient cannot be identified from the information released.

Exceptional circumstances

Responsibility for disclosure rests with the patient's dentist only. Under no circumstances can any other member of staff make such a decision.

There may be some circumstances when the dentist feels it would be in the public interest to breach a patient's confidentiality. In such cases, the dentist should get advice from their indemnifier before releasing the patient's information to a third party.

A court may order you to release information without the patient's consent. If so, only release the minimum information and speak with your indemnity provider first.

Access to records

Patients have a right to see their records and the practice should meet their request within 40 days. A request from a patient to see records or for a copy must be referred to the patient's dentist.

The patient should be given the opportunity of coming into the practice to discuss the records and will then be given a photocopy.

More information

For more information on this topic, speak with the practice owner or practice manager. Alternatively contact the organisations below.

General Dental Council (www.gdc-uk.org)

Information Commissioner (www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk)

Dental Defence Union (www.the-ddu.com)

Dental Protection Ltd (www.dentalprotection.org)

MDDUS (<http://www.mddus.com/>)