

Patient Rights: Confidentiality and Consent

As a patient getting treatment for a substance use disorder, your personal and medical information is protected under United States confidentiality law. This law states that your doctor is not allowed to tell anyone the reason you are being treated, without your permission. Doctors and treatment programs that provide addiction treatment are not even allowed to tell anyone whether or not you are a patient.

Patient Consent

With your approval --sometimes called *consent* -- your doctor may let others, such as your insurance company or your family, know about your treatment. No information will be released unless you sign a consent form, which will include the name of your doctor or treatment provider, the person/group to whom your information is going, the purpose of the disclosure, how much information may be communicated, when the consent form expires, and the date. Even if you sign a consent form, you have the right to change your mind at any time. If you do change your mind, your doctor will not share any additional information with others.

Impact on Treatment

The confidentiality law is strict, but it will not keep you from getting good treatment. Exceptions were written into the law to make sure that patients still get excellent care. For instance, information can be shared among treatment staff in order to provide you with better treatment. Also, the law takes into account unexpected things that might happen. For instance, if there is a medical emergency and if they need to know, the medical personnel treating you can be told that you are receiving maintenance treatment for a substance use disorder.

The Last Word

Remember, the confidentiality law was set up to protect your rights. Ask your doctor if you have more questions about confidentiality or consent.