



Position Statement

Health information: protecting patient rights

ICN Position:

Patients have the right to be fully informed about their health. Equally, they have the right to expect necessary safeguards are in place to protect the privacy of patient records, while at the same time facilitating portability of information and patient access to information.

The International Council of Nurses (ICN) believes that persons receiving health care services should be seen as the primary owner of their health information, with the right to access their health information and to determine any sharing of their health information with others. This includes information related to their health problems, the actions proposed or taken by caregivers, and the consequences of these actions.

Individual nurses and professional nursing associations must be familiar with rights, responsibilities, protocols and legislation in their country, regarding patients' rights to privacy. Professional nursing associations should assist nurses in understanding and exercising their responsibilities.

ICN supports efforts to establish national or international protocols and standards for portable health records that could be used as guidelines to increase patient or caregiver information, understanding and participation in their care.

Professional nursing associations should monitor research and the introduction of national and international guidelines on health information adapted for use in their country and the impact of changing technology on patients' rights to health information.

Background

Health and other information systems used in the planning, management and delivery of health and related services may pose threats to patients' rights to privacy and require measures to ensure privacy.

Nurses and others must exercise due care to protect patients' right to privacy of health information.

Nurses must understand the ethical values and legal implications underling their own responsibilities in respect of patients' right to privacy.

Where patient confidentiality and privacy of health information is covered by law, and nurses neglect their responsibilities under the law, they may face legal consequences.

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Related ICN Positions:

- Scope of Nursing Practice
- Impact of the Use of High Technology Equipment in Nursing Care

ICN Publications:

- ICN Code of Ethics
- Ethical Guidelines for Nursing Research (2003). ICN, Geneva, Switzerland
- Ethics in Nursing Practice. Blackwell Publishing, UK Fry, S., Johnstone, M.J. (2002).
- Guidelines: Law and the Workplace (2004). ICN, Geneva, Switzerland

The International Council of Nurses is a federation of more than 130 national nurses associations representing the millions of nurses worldwide. Operated by nurses and leading nursing internationally, ICN works to ensure quality nursing care for all and sound health policies globally.