



Position Statement

Health information: protecting patients' rights

ICN Position:

People have the right to be fully informed about their health. Equally, they have the right to expect that necessary safeguards are in place to protect privacy and confidentiality of health records and other sources of personal information, while at the same time facilitating portability of information and access to information. This applies to manual systems and across the full range of information and communication technologies. The International Council of Nurses (ICN) believes that people 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 results or consequences of these actions. Individual nurses should be familiar with rights, responsibilities, protocols and legislation in their country, regarding people's rights to privacy. Individual nurses should also be aware of their duty to share information, with appropriate ethical and legal safeguards, in order to enhance care.

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 also 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 people's 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 people's rights to privacy and require measures to ensure privacy. Nurses and other healthcare providers should exercise due care to protect people's rights to privacy and confidentiality of health information. Nurses should understand the ethical values and legal implications underlying their own responsibilities in respect of people's rights to privacy.

**International
Council of Nurses**

3, place Jean-Marteau
CH -1201 Geneva • Switzerland
Telephone +41 (22) 908 0100
Fax +41 (22) 908 0101
e-Mail : icn@icn.ch
Website : www.icn.ch

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Related ICN Positions:

- Scope of Nursing Practice
- Patient Safety
- Informed Patients

ICN Publications:

- ICN Code of Ethics for Nurses (2012)
- Ethics in Nursing Practice (2008)
- Guidelines: Law and the Workplace (2010)

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.