

WHEN A CO-WORKER IS A UCMC PATIENT

As a University of Chicago Medical Center (UCMC) employee you might find out, either through word of mouth or observation, that a current or former co-worker is a UCMC patient. Once you become aware of the information, you may want to contact or visit the patient to see how he/she is doing out of concern. However, under the laws that govern patient privacy, your first obligation is to respect and protect your co-workers' privacy.

When your co-worker is a patient, treat him/her just like any other patient. Your co-worker is entitled to and deserves the same privacy and confidentiality that you would give to any other patient. In order to respect and protect your co-worker's privacy, you must follow these guidelines:

1. If you are directly involved in the co-worker's treatment or care (e.g. physician, nurse):
 - a. Only access protected health information (PHI) related to the reason why you are involved in the co-worker's care.
 - b. Only share PHI with the treatment team and if the patient has given permission, with the patient's family/friends.
 - c. Do not share the information, including the fact that the co-worker is a patient, with your family, friends, and other co-workers.

2. If you are not directly involved in the co-worker's treatment or care:
 - a. Keep the fact that the co-worker is a UCMC patient to yourself unless the co-worker has expressly asked you to share this fact with another person.
 - b. Do not share information you may know (e.g. room location, diagnosis) with any other individuals – including your family, friends, and co-workers.
 - c. Do not access or look at the co-worker's PHI – even out of concern.
 - d. Do not stop by to visit the co-worker without first checking at the nurses' station to confirm that the co-worker is your visit.
 - e. Do not ask individuals involved in the co-worker's care for information.

Consider the courtesy you would expect, if you were a patient and did not want co-workers accessing your PHI, discussing your situation, or coming to visit you without your explicit permission.

Contact the HIPAA Program Office at 4-9716 with questions.