
WHEN YOUR PATIENT MAKES THE NEWS....

Imagine this: You are drinking your morning coffee and watching the news. You are shocked to hear one of the following reports:

- Your patient has been arrested, accused of murder
- Your patient has committed suicide
- Your patient has been the victim of a horrible crime

What should you do, and what should you not do?

YOU SHOULD call us right away to report an “event.” This is required under your policy, but it will also allow us to get involved right away to ensure that your interests are protected. With the examples listed above, it is very likely you will be contacted by some form of law enforcement, as well as possibly by the media.

IF YOU ARE CONTACTED BY THE PRESS: Do not speak to the media, regardless of whether information is sought by television or print. If you were treating the person, do not confirm that the person was even a patient. Even if you were not treating, but you happened to have done a curbside consult on this patient with the treating physician, do not reveal anything about your colleague’s patient or even the fact that you discussed this person with your colleague. You have a duty to maintain confidential information shared with you by another provider for treatment purposes.

IF YOU ARE CONTACTED BY A GOVERNMENTAL AGENT, such as law enforcement, the Medical Examiner, the prosecutor, etc. for information: Call us prior to responding, even if you have called in the event previously, so we can provide assistance with how to respond. If you are not able to speak with us immediately, the following guidelines may be useful until we can provide you with specific advice:

- Do not assume that anyone is entitled to information about your patient, even for investigation purposes, regardless of what the investigator may say
- A patient’s arrest or even death is not an exception to patient confidentiality
- The exceptions to the normal requirement of patient authorization required to release information are very, very limited
- Consider responding as follows: “Any information I may have about this person would be confidential. I want to cooperate, but I need you to put your request in writing and cite your authority for the disclosure. Upon receipt, I will promptly process your request.”



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