



American College of
Emergency Physicians®

ADVANCING EMERGENCY CARE 

POLICY STATEMENT

Approved January 2017

Confidentiality of Patient Information

Revised with current title
January 2017

Reaffirmed October 2008,
October 2002, October 1998

Originally approved titled
“Patient Confidentiality”
January 1994

As an adjunct to this policy,
ACEP has prepared a Policy
Resource and Education Paper
(PREP) titled, “From
Hippocrates to HIPAA:
Privacy and Confidentiality in
Emergency Medicine”

The American College of Emergency Physicians believes that all physicians have an ethical and legal duty to guard and respect the confidential nature of the personal information conveyed during the patient-physician encounter. Emergency Physicians implicitly promise to preserve confidentiality of patient information, a promise that in turn promotes patients' autonomy, and trust in their Emergency Physicians.

ACEP believes confidentiality of patient information is an important but not absolute principle. Confidential patient information may be disclosed when patients or their legal surrogates agree to disclosure, when mandated by law, or when there exist overriding and compelling grounds for disclosure, such as the prevention of substantial harm to identifiable other persons.

Certain other situations may require individual assessment of clinical circumstances, patient wishes, state and federal laws, and public health requirements. Specific problem areas include but are not limited to cases involving minors, drug testing, employee health, perpetrators and victims of violent crimes, medical records, the media, and communicable and sexually transmitted diseases. In such cases not directly addressed by the law, individualized assessment and management, based on these principles of confidentiality of patient information, constitute best practice.