



Notice:

Plymouth Community Healthcare Community Interest Company adopted all Provider policies from NHS Plymouth when it became a new organisation on 1 October 2011.

Please note that policies will be reviewed to reflect the new organisation in line with the reader information sheet, or sooner where this is possible.

Plymouth Teaching Primary Care Trust
Transferring Person Identifiable Information
by Fax Policy
Version No 2:3

Notice to staff using a paper copy of this guidance

The policies and procedures page of Healthnet holds the most recent and approved version of this guidance. Staff must ensure they are using the most recent guidance.

Authors/Editor Business Development Manager

Access ID Number 3

Reader Information

Type of formal paper	Policy
Category and Ratification Process	Corporate
Document Purpose	To ensure staff work to a set of procedures when faxing personal information.
Title	Transferring Person Identifiable information by Fax Policy v2:2
Author (s)/Editor (s)	Business Development Manager
Ratification Date	12 th May 2006, Governance Committee.
Review Date	31/05/2013
Title of person responsible for review	Caldicott Guardian
Target Audience	All Staff
Circulation List	Electronic: ✓ Written: Upon Request to Public Information Service
Description	This document describes a set of procedures which explain to staff how to maintain the confidentiality of a person's information, when it needs to be shared with other teams or organisations.
Cross References	Trust Safe and Secure Handling of Medicines Guidelines Current Edition
Supersedes Doc	Peninsula Guide to faxing patient identifiable information 2002
Contact Details	Business Development Manager Trust HQ

Document Review History

Revision No.	Date of Change	Originator of Change	Description of Change
Version 2	13/7/2005	Stuart Edmunds	Formatting to agreed corporate layout
V2:1	01/05/2006	Deborah Reeves	Minor additions
V2:2	03/11/2009	T. Maclennan	Reviewed, no changes made.
V2:3	31/05/2011	Author	Reviewed, no changes made.

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1. Introduction

This fax policy has been developed as an operational policy and guidance. It has been discussed with the South and West Devon Health Community group of Caldicott Guardians and Devon Social Services. It is to be adopted in principle by the organisations represented on the group in order to standardise procedures in the South West area of Devon.

Person-identifiable information which is to be faxed must be subject to Safe Haven procedures. Safe Haven is a Caldicott term used in the National Health Service (NHS) and Social Care Services for a set of procedures which explain to staff how to maintain the confidentiality of a person's information, when it needs to be shared with other teams or organisations.

2. Guidance when using fax machines

In some limited circumstances it is acceptable to use fax machines to transfer person – identifiable details.

The information transferred should be restricted to the minimum necessary and only those items of information that are essential to the purpose should be included. Care must be taken because fax machines often produce output of low quality; even a missed decimal point could have disastrous consequences if the data were relied upon for patient care.

In line with the Caldicott requirements information must be anonymised where possible by using the NHS number, or a hospital number, or the Social Services personal reference number as opposed to name and address. Names should only be used when absolutely necessary - such as in those circumstances where there are no other common items between the parties. Care must be taken to ensure that errors are not made and information is not unlawfully disclosed to inappropriate locations.

Where advice is needed, the Caldicott Guardian should be your point of contact.

3. Circumstances when the use of fax is acceptable.

The fax machine should only be used to transmit person-identifiable information in exceptional circumstances; such as if other methods are not sufficient or other alternatives such as letter or encrypted electronic mail are not available.

Also it is acceptable to use the fax in an emergency, where delay would cause harm or the potential risk to the data subject is greater than the risk of disclosure.

Thirdly, in circumstances – such as when a letter of complaint arrives at an office other than the Complaints Department – where compliance with

National requirements (in this case, the time limit for acknowledgement of a response) is essential, it is acceptable to use a fax machine.

3.1 Agreed concessions where fax may be used

- Cancer care urgent referrals.
- Cases where alternative methods would not meet with the 0900 deadline for Out-of-Hours reports to be received at GP practices or relevant centres.
- Complaints letters received at other than the Complaints Department.
- Inter-practice, and primary care to secondary care urgent referrals.
- The provision of urgent information to a GP from a secondary care provider.
- The timely management of patient transport involving West Country Ambulance Services Trust.
- Transfer of urgent information from the Public Health Development Unit.
- Transfer of urgent information between Health and Social Care Services.
- Urgent cases involving Psychiatric Advisory Service, Emergency Psychiatric Service and Out of Hours teams.
- [Ordering of medication from pharmacy when there would otherwise be an unacceptable delay to treatment or discharge. Refer to the Trust "Safe and Secure Handling of Medicines Guidelines" for the procedure to be followed.](#)

4. Information which should not be faxed.

The fax machine should not, routinely, be used for transferring sensitive information such as that concerning HIV status or drug misuse. Information such as incriminating evidence should never be submitted using facsimile equipment. No third-party information should ever be identifiable.

Where advice is needed, the Caldicott Guardian can offer advice.

5. Access and Authorisation

Fax machines should be sited in a secure environment where unauthorised staff cannot access them or view the information and any faxes received out of hours are secure.

6. Transmission Procedure

Where patient information is to be transferred by fax, the following procedure should be followed wherever possible:

- Use a fax cover sheet that contains a confidentiality statement and clearly states who the fax is for (see Annex A).
- Unless you are sending details to an unmanned fax machine, for example out of hours reports, contact the recipient of the fax (or their representative) to let them know you are going to send confidential information.
- Ask the recipient to confirm receipt of the fax within an agreed timescale. The transmission printout confirms that the fax has left the machine, it does not confirm delivery.
- Programme numbers into the fax machine memory where ever possible to avoid misdialling, otherwise confirm the number before the fax is sent.
- On completion retain the printed record of transmission as confirmation the fax was successful and include it with a copy of the cover sheet as proof of sending.
- If you are the recipient of a confidential fax you should ensure that you or someone on your behalf is at the receiving end waiting for it. No printouts should be left unattended at the fax machine.

7. Audit

If appropriate a logging system of confidential faxes sent should be set up and maintained. The log should include the following details as a minimum:-

- date and time
- senders name and contact details
- recipient's name, telephone number and organisation (as detailed on the cover sheet)

A record of transmission from the fax machine on completion could also be held.

8. Incident Reporting.

A security incident is defined as any event which has resulted, or could have resulted in for example; the disclosure of confidential information to any unauthorised individual, the integrity of the system or data being put at risk or the availability of the system of information being put at risk.

Staff should report any actual or suspected breaches of security or potential weaknesses in the secure operation of the fax equipment.

Annex A - Example of a cover sheet

COVERING CONFIDENTIAL
URGENT FAX

From :

Tel :	Date :
Fax :	Time :

To :

Tel:
Fax :

Total No of Pages (Including Cover Sheet)

Important Information

This fax is confidential and is intended solely for the addressee. If you have received this fax in error, please immediately notify the sender by telephone on the number above and return the message to them by post. If you are not the intended recipient any disclosure, copying or distribution of the message is strictly prohibited

Message starts on next page

Signed:

Date: