



POLICY

Physicians Accessing Patient Specific Information from Electronic Databases

STATUS:	APPROVED
Approved by Council:	June 2005
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To be reviewed:	TBD

Preamble

Saskatchewan currently has several electronic databases that contain personal health information of all Saskatchewan residents. These include the Pharmaceutical Information Program (PIP), the electronic Health Record (eHR) Viewer, and the picture archiving and communication system (PACS). In addition, many individual clinics and facilities maintain electronic medical records (EMR) that contain personal health information of all patients of those clinics/facilities.

Access to information within these databases is provided to physicians and other authorized health care providers to assist them in providing the best possible quality of medical care to their patients. However, given the accessibility to patient specific information for individuals who may not be in a physician-patient relationship with the physician, it is important to emphasize the privacy expectations relevant to these types of electronic databases.

Accessing, using, or disseminating information from any electronic database that contains patient specific information, other than as permitted in this policy, is improper and may potentially be unprofessional conduct.

Definitions

For the purpose of this policy, an “**electronic database**” includes any database accessible by electronic means that contains patient specific information. This includes the PIP, the eHR Viewer, PACS, and EMR in a clinic or facility setting.

General Principles

Physicians must be able to justify the reason for accessing information through an electronic database.

Physicians should only access information through an electronic database when the information that the physician expects to obtain may reasonably affect the medical care provided to the patient.

Physicians should only access the minimum amount of information through an electronic database that is reasonably required for the purpose for which the information was accessed.

Only those persons who have a need to know the information should be permitted to access the information.

Physicians should only use the information from an electronic database for the purpose of providing medical care to their patient, or as is otherwise permitted by *The Health Information Protection Act*.

Physicians should only disclose the information from an electronic database for the purpose of providing medical care to their patient, with the consent of the patient, or as is otherwise permitted by *The Health Information Protection Act*.

Physicians should have appropriate policies and procedures in place to protect the information accessed through an electronic database from being seen by persons who are not authorized to see that information.

Physicians must comply with *The Health Information Protection Act* in connection with the information accessed through an electronic database.

Physicians should ensure that persons who the physician authorizes to access the information in an electronic database are aware of and understand their responsibilities.

Specific Requirements

Physicians will not permit any person under their authority or control to access the information within an electronic database unless the following conditions are met:

- That person has been specifically authorized by the physician to access the electronic database for a purpose for which the physician may access the information;
- That person has signed a confidentiality agreement in which that person has agreed, among other things, to access the information only on a need-to-know basis, and not to disclose the information to any other person except as permitted by *The Health Information Protection Act*.

If a physician reasonably suspects that activities by an individual or entity may compromise the confidentiality of confidential patient specific information or be a breach of this policy, the physician must report these activities to the relevant program, person or organization. This could include eHealth Saskatchewan, the Saskatchewan Health Authority, or the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Saskatchewan.