

## ACCESS TO PATIENT INFORMATION

To: P&S Class of 2009

From: Lisa A. Mellman, M.D.  
Senior Associate Dean for Student Affairs

The following is the College of Physicians & Surgeons' policy on students' access to patient information. Please review it carefully as it relates to your professional conduct. If you have questions, please contact the Office of Student Affairs at 305-3806.

Maintenance of patient confidentiality is absolutely required of all, and of you especially in your roles as medical student. The opportunity to unwittingly divulge such information abounds. It is your responsibility to never reveal any patient information at any time except in your appropriate role as medical student. P&S students' record in this respect in recent times of high profile has been exemplary.

Similar confidentiality must be observed in such locations as elevators, halls outside patient floors and conference rooms, nurses stations, the shuttle buses to East 60<sup>th</sup> Street, Allen Pavilion, Harlem Hospital, the main campus, plus dining rooms and academic buildings. At no time are you to mention patients' names or carry their radiology folders or charts with name exposed. These principles remain whether the individual patient is new to you or a friend, classmate, relative, co-worker, supervisor or other acquaintance.

Patient information and maintenance of confidentiality is essential to providing good patient care. Your ability to access this confidential information is a privilege granted to you because you are to use it to provide good patient care in the least intrusive, most effective manner. Utilization of your privilege to access this information for any other reason is a breach of ethical conduct and it is unprofessional and unethical and it is illegal.

This is true of all patient information whether or not the patient has a special relationship to the institution, as often indicated on computer screens, and regardless of the source of the patient information, e.g. charts, x-rays, lab data, computer prints, etc.

There is a specific computer screen which appears when you attempt to access information of an individual who has a special relationship to the institution. You must override that screen to continue in your quest of information. **If you override that screen without the need to know, you have breached the privilege granted to you.**

When you are provided with an access code for the patient information system, you sign a legal document that states you will use this information only to provide patient care and in the context of the need to know. **In addition, there is a very explicit statement in the student handbook which indicates that if you access patient information without the need to know that your academic status will be reviewed by the Faculty and you may have your matriculation in the College of P&S terminated.**