Introduction
It is vital that all who work at The Royal Children’s Hospital (RCH) have a practical understanding of how to maintain confidentiality.
Privacy and confidentiality are terms often used interchangeably. Privacy concerns the practices of government agencies e.g. a Hospital, whilst confidentiality concerns the actions of individual staff.
Privacy is the right of individuals to keep information about themselves from being disclosed; that is, our patients and parents (forthwith referred to as patients) are in control of access to themselves or information about themselves. Patients decide who, when, and where to share their health information.
Confidentiality is how we, as staff employees, take care of private information once it has been disclosed. This disclosure of information results from a relationship of trust; it assumes that health information is given with the expectation that it will not be divulged except in ways that have been agreed upon, e.g. for treatment or payment of services.
Please refer to the RCH Policy and Procedure Manual for policies specifically related to Privacy as this brochure includes more general information about what is confidential information and outlines your responsibilities.
All information supplied by our patients and other information that we use in our daily work must remain confidential.
Patient Information
Information provided by patients enables our health care providers to care and treat them in the most appropriate manner. In order to facilitate this, patients must feel comfortable divulging personal and sensitive information to these staff. If patients do not feel comfortable, there is a risk that important information may not be disclosed, thus compromising care of the patient.
Patients may not want their friends or relatives knowing that they are a patient of RCH so staff must be discreet with this information. In the same way, staff who have children or relatives who are patients of RCH also expect all staff to be discreet.
Hospital information
Other information created or received by RCH also needs to be treated confidentially. For example, information contained in human resource notes, meeting minutes or tender submissions must be treated confidentially. There are many hospital databases (both department based and hospital-wide) which include patient and staff information. Access to these databases is privileged and must not be abused in order to obtain information that is not relevant to your work. Please refer to the ICT Security policies for further information.
All types of information whether it is stored in hard copy or electronically must be treated with sensitivity and discretion.
Acting responsibly
You are in a position of trust working at RCH where privileged personal information is collected and recorded for a variety of required purposes. You may also encounter a patient whom you already know as part of you role. However, you may not have known that patient was here had you not been working here. It is important to remember that some information only became known to you during your course of employment at RCH. That information is confidential and must not be discussed other than in the course of your work when relevant to the performance of your role.
Staff should refer to the RCH Code of Conduct in the Policy and Procedure Manual for guidance in this matter.

Implications
Failure to handle confidential information in a sensitive and discreet fashion will diminish patient trust. Unnecessary embarrassment or suffering may be caused or patients may no longer give staff relevant information needed for care and treatment. In some instances, patients may believe they can no longer use our services. Patient care is at risk.

Inappropriate use of this information will undermine the Hospital and other staff and imply that other staff are indiscreet and that the Hospital is not committed to protecting patient information from unauthorised disclosure.

The Health Records Act and the Information Privacy Act both allow for fines to be allocated to individuals and institutions that breach this legislation. An RCH employee may also be instantly dismissed for a flagrant breach of confidentiality.

Maintaining confidentiality
There are a number of practical steps that can be taken to ensure you preserve confidentiality of information. You can also reassure patients that their personal information is treated with sensitivity and discretion in the way you handle their information. Listed below are some examples:

At work:
- Handle medical records as confidential documents. Don’t leave them in the corridor or take them to the cafeteria. Don’t leave them on display in public areas or in an area that is unattended by staff.
- Be discreet when discussing patients and their personal details. Don’t hold the discussion in front of others who are not involved with the patient’s care and refrain from discussing patients when it is not relevant to their care.
- Make sure you have the RCH Privacy Matters screen saver installed, and a short time set prior to commencement.
- The lockable security bins must be used for disposal of paper based confidential information.
- If you believe confidentiality is being breached in any way by any staff, please inform your Manager or the RCH Privacy Officer.
- Check that fax numbers are correct before sending confidential information.
- Be aware of what might be heard by callers when using the phone that is not appropriate: put them on hold if necessary.
- Do not disclose your co-workers private information with staff or patients unless permission has been sought.

At home:
- Do not discuss with family or friends RCH patients details and if asked inform them that you are not permitted to disclose any information. This includes patient names.
- Do not discuss patient information with the media and follow Hospital Policy in regard to any interactions you have with them.

Information can be sent to other health care providers for ongoing patient care, whilst obtaining consent where appropriate.

Maintaining patient and hospital confidentiality doesn’t require lots of effort, it should be second nature. All staff have an obligation to act responsibly when we have privileged access to, or knowledge of, confidential information.

Privacy Officer
The Royal Children’s Hospital,
Flemington Rd, Parkville 3052
www.rch.org.au/rchhis/privacy