Health PEI

Privacy and Access Odds & Ends: E-mail Edition

📧 Internal Vs. External E-Mail

➢ An internal e-mail is one being sent to a Health PEI or Government of PEI colleague at their @ihis.org or @gov.pe.ca account.

➢ Internal e-mails are encrypted which means they are more secure than those sent to an address outside of our organization, or an external e-mail.

➢ Check out the best practices on the right that you can incorporate, including some that are especially important for external e-mails.

"Need to Know" Principle

➢ As employees of the health system, we are often required to share information about our patients, residents, and clients for the purposes of their care. It could be with our colleagues, other care providers, law firms, insurance companies, etc. In situations like this, it is important to consider the "Need to Know" principle.

➢ There is a common misconception that anyone who has been part of the patient's "Circle of Care," has permitted access to that person's information at any time for any reason. This is NOT the case.

➢ We are working to transition away from the "Circle of Care" way of thinking, to the "Need to Know" principle, which aligns with our provincial legislation, the *Health Information Act.*

➢ Before sending an e-mail that includes patient information, ask yourself the following questions to help determine if the need to know exists:

  o Does the intended recipient need to know this information for the purposes of their role?

  o What is the reason for the recipient's need to know?

  o Will the intended recipient be taking action or making a decision as a result of accessing this information?

BEST PRACTICES

➢ Make sure you have entered the e-mail address properly, selected the correct recipient from the Address Book, and/or selected the correct person from the pop-up list we often see in Outlook.

➢ If your recipient is an internal one, double check that the name, position, and location of the person matches your intended recipient.

➢ If you are unsure you have the correct person or e-mail address, send an e-mail without any identifying information first, to confirm you have the right person.

➢ Before hitting send, go back to review the recipient fields in case information was added or removed in error.

➢ Never include any identifying information in the subject line of an e-mail. Instead, use a generic subject and save the identifying and/or sensitive information for the body of the e-mail.

➢ Include only the minimum amount of information required to serve the purpose of your e-mail.

➢ For e-mails where you are sending a patient their own information at their request, ask them to acknowledge and accept the risks associated with electronic transmission prior to sending the information. Click here and review section 6 for an example of the language you can use.

➢ Consider using a Secure File Transfer option for sending attachments that include Personal Information or Personal Health Information to external addresses, for the highest level of security. You can contact ITSS for more information on this.

➢ Use caution when sending personal or sensitive information to a group. Ensure that the group only receives pertinent information and consider whether every person in the group requires the information (i.e. assess the "Need to Know"!)

➢ Use caution when responding to or forwarding e-mails that contain personal information. This can lead to an accumulation of information that may result in inappropriate or unauthorized disclosure.