

# UConn HEALTH

## Procedures for Policy 2021-04 Disclosures of Protected Health Information to the Media

### A. Receiving and Responding to Media Requests for PHI

1. UConn Health *may*, but is not required to, disclose PHI to the media as specified in these procedures and the corresponding policy. UConn Health may decline to disclose PHI to the media at any time and for any reason, even if HIPAA would permit such disclosure.
2. All requests for information from the media must be referred to University Communications. University Communications is the only department allowed to disclose patient information to the media, unless otherwise designated by senior leadership. Staff from University Communications are on call 24/7 and may be contacted through the UConn Health operator during off hours.
3. University Communications will consult with the Office of Healthcare Compliance and Privacy (OHCP), along with the Office of the General Counsel prior to disclosing PHI to the media.
4. Pursuant to UConn Health's Notice of Privacy Practices, when the media asks for a patient by name and the patient is not excluded from the Hospital Directory (either by choice, automatically, or by the OHCP), UConn Health may disclose only the patient's location within the Hospital. UConn Health may not disclose a patient's condition in response to a request from the media.
5. When an individual is not a patient of the Hospital, or is excluded from the Hospital directory (either by choice, automatically, or by the OHCP), the media will be told that there is no information available for that individual.

### B. Disclosing PHI to the Media Under Emergency/Disaster Circumstances

1. UConn Health may disclose minimum necessary PHI to the media under emergency/disaster circumstances, as specifically described in [Policy 2021-04 Disclosures of Protected Health Information to the Media](#), to identify, locate, and notify family members, guardians, or anyone else responsible for the individual's care about the individual's location, general condition, or death.
  - a. When disclosing a patient's general condition for notification purposes as described above, UConn Health will use terms that do not communicate specific medical information about the individual.

Following are some examples of permissible ways to describe a patient's general condition to the media for notification purposes:

- **Undetermined** (Patient is awaiting assessment).
- **Stable** (Vital signs are stable and within normal limits.)
- **Serious** (Vital signs may be unstable and not within normal limits. Patient is acutely ill. Indicators are questionable.)
- **Critical** (Vital signs are unstable and not within normal limits. Patient may be unconscious. Indicators are unfavorable.)
- **Treated and released** (Patient has been discharged.) *Note: Information regarding the date of release or where the patient went upon release must not be disclosed without an Authorization.*
- **Deceased:** UConn Health may disclose to the media the fact that a patient is deceased, but must not disclose the date, time, or manner of the patient's death. UConn Health may additionally disclose limited information to describe the patient's general characteristics (e.g., age, gender, height, weight).

### C. Uses and Disclosures of PHI for Publicity or Marketing Purposes

1. Uses and disclosures of PHI for publicity or marketing purposes (e.g., in brochures, publications, commercials, or on social media) generally require a signed Authorization and must be referred to University Communications. University Communications will determine the extent of its involvement in the project and the individual responsible for obtaining an Authorization from the patient (or authorized representative).
2. Prior to using or disclosing a patient's PHI for publicity or marketing purposes, UConn Health must obtain an Authorization from the patient using form [HCH2714 Authorization to Use and/or Disclose Protected Health Information for Publicity Purposes](#). One copy of the signed Authorization will be provided to the patient and another copy will be retained by University Communications.
3. Information Related to Behavioral Health, Substance Abuse Treatment, or HIV/AIDS. Special rules apply to PHI relating to behavioral health, substance abuse treatment, or HIV/AIDS testing or treatment. University Communications will contact the Office of Healthcare Compliance and Privacy prior to obtaining an Authorization to use or disclose PHI in one or more of these categories for publicity or marketing purposes.