



The College of Nurses of Ontario presents the Documentation practice standard: Electronic Health Records.

## Electronic health records

- The standards are the same as for documenting on paper.
- The care provider must sign the electronic record.
- Electronic signatures are valid if used for accountability and if accessible only by the signatory.



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THE STANDARD OF CARE.

The standards for documentation remain the same whether nurses use paper records or electronic records, such as computer files, videos and voice recordings. As with paper systems, electronic documentation must be comprehensive, accurate and timely. It must clearly identify who provided what care and who documented. The system needs to allow for clearly identifiable changes and corrections without deletion of the original entry.

Documentation in an electronic record must be signed by the care provider. Electronic signatures are valid if used to demonstrate accountability and if accessible only to the person identified by the signature.

## Confidentiality

- are accountable for safeguarding the confidentiality of information;
- need to know the legislation for maintaining confidentiality; and
- should advocate for systems that facilitate documentation and confidentiality.



[Click here to read Confidentiality and Privacy – Personal Health Information](#)

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When clients entrust personal information to a health care professional or facility, it is essential to safeguard the confidentiality of the information. All nurses are accountable for protecting the confidentiality of client information in an electronic record, just as they are with a paper system.

Nurses need to be aware of the relevant legislation that relates to maintaining confidentiality and advocate for systems that facilitate documentation and confidentiality. To learn more about a nurse's responsibilities in maintaining confidentiality, pause the presentation and review the College's *Confidentiality and Privacy – Personal Health Information* practice standard.

## Safeguarding information

- Ensure that passwords are kept confidential, and change the passwords according to facility policies.
- Use passwords that cannot be easily deciphered.
- Log off when not using the system.
- Never delete information.



Only use electronic health records if you have reason to believe that the records are both secure and confidential. To safeguard the confidentiality of client information, position the monitor so it can't be viewed by others, and use passwords. Choose passwords that can't be easily deciphered, and change them frequently if security is at risk. Log off the computer when you're not using the system and when you leave the terminal. Nurses must never delete information and should access only the information that they need professionally.

## Scenario

Jane's facility recently introduced an electronic order entry system. The computer on her unit alerts her when an order is received for her client. The physician could be somewhere else in the hospital and entering the order from a remote terminal. While this has reduced the need for telephone orders, Jane is concerned about how she can safeguard the confidentiality of client information when using an electronic recorder.

Read the scenario and answer the question that follows.

**How can Jane safeguard confidentiality when using electronic records?**

- a) Maintain the confidentiality of passwords or other access information
- b) Change passwords as per facility policy or more frequently if security is at risk.
- c) Use passwords that can't be easily deciphered.
- d) Log off when not using the system or when leaving the terminal.
- e) All of the above.

## Discussion

The answer is E.

Nurses are accountable for safeguarding the confidentiality of client information in an electronic record, just as they are with a paper system. To protect information, choose passwords that can't be easily deciphered, maintain the confidentiality of passwords, change passwords according to facility policies and log off when not using the system.

Read the discussion.

## Confidentiality

Your score	{score}
Max score	{max-score}
Number of quiz attempts	{total-attempts}

## Transmission of health information

### Transmitting by e-mail

- Refrain from using standard e-mail to send health information.
- Ensure that security-enhanced e-mail is effective before using it to transmit health information.
- Use the subject line and body of the e-mail to alert the recipient that the message is confidential.

In some practice settings, nurses may be required to transmit confidential client information to another location. Whether transmitting by mail, courier, e-mail or fax, confidentiality can be threatened. Nurses transmitting information must take precautions to protect client confidentiality. The use of e-mail is widespread in business and health care environments. However, e-mails are inherently insecure for transmitting confidential information. Messages can be misdirected or intercepted by unintended recipients. There are software programs that can greatly enhance e-mail confidentiality through encryption, user verification and secure point-to-point connections. Nurses should only transmit confidential information via e-mail when they can reasonably believe that the transmission is secure.

## Transmission of health information

### Transmitting by fax

- Ensure that the fax number is current and correct.
- Include a confidentiality warning on the cover sheet.
- Make a reasonable effort to ensure that the fax will be immediately retrieved by the intended recipient.
- Obtain client consent.

Facsimile transmission is a convenient, efficient way to communicate information between health care providers and to authorize independent functions, such as a physician's order. Nurses, however, should use caution when sending health information by fax. Confidential information can be sent to the wrong person by misdialing and, once sent, the message is irretrievable. Once received at the other end, the information might be read and/or copied by unintended recipients.

When sending faxes, ensure that you're using the correct fax number and include a cover sheet that is clearly marked confidential. In addition, make an effort to ensure that the fax will be retrieved immediately by the intended recipient. If client information is being sent by fax outside of the care facility, nurses must obtain client consent prior to transmitting the information.

## Transmission of health information

### Transmitting by mail or courier

- Enclose the health information in an envelope, seal it and identify it as confidential.
- Choose a method that enables you to track delivery.

Client information may also be sent via regular mail or courier. In these situations, information should be enclosed in an envelope, sealed and clearly identified as confidential. As a precaution, choose a method that enables you to track delivery.

## Key points to remember

- The standards for documentation remain the same whether nurses use paper records or electronic records.
- Nurses are accountable for safeguarding the confidentiality of information.
- Nurses should refrain from using standard e-mail to send health information.

This chapter provided an overview of nurses' responsibilities in relation to electronic health records and the transmission of health records. Key points to remember include the accountability of nurses in maintaining the confidentiality of client information in an electronic record and the importance of taking measures to protect the information. Nurses should only send health record information by e-mail if they have reason to believe that the transmission is secure.

## Documentation standards

Purpose of Documentation

Meeting the Standards

Electronic Health Records

Other Considerations

Charting by exception

Accessing health records

Documenting telephone nursing care



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Three additional chapters focus on documentation. The Purpose of Documentation and Meeting The Standards learning module demonstrates how to meet the practice standard. The Other Considerations learning module focuses on charting by exception, accessing and retaining health records and documenting care by phone. To view these chapters, close this presentation and return to the Learning Centre.

To ask a College practice consultant a question, click on “Contact” in the upper right-hand corner of your screen.