

Releasing Dental Records When Requested: What You Need to Know

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Sometimes patients complain when their healthcare providers don't release their medical records upon request. As dental providers, we bear the responsibility of maintaining accurate and complete patient records. These records include a patient's journey through their entire dental health history and treatment, holding crucial

information that is vital for safe and effective patient care. Providers are also responsible, however, for knowing when it is appropriate to release patient records, especially when patients specifically ask for them.

Most dentists can likely relate to instances when a patient demands their records or asks for them to be released to a third party, such as when a patient is transferring to a new dentist, applying for dental insurance, or involved in a legal dispute. Releasing critical patient information can be a slippery slope if not done properly or if healthcare professionals remain in the dark on the proper protocols. Here, we'll dive into the rules and regulations surrounding the release of dental records so that dental professionals can be well equipped to handle these requests.

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First, it's important to be reminded that dental records are not just a collection of papers but are part of the building blocks that establish patient trust in us. Well-kept records are a testament to a patient's health journey, showing those that we care for that we are listening, paying attention, and providing them with the best possible care. Since these personal records may include diagnostic images, treatment plans, progress notes, and other information, they are considered highly confidential. Therefore, another element of developing sound patient trust is keeping these documents secure. So, when is it appropriate to share these records? The answer lies in patient consent, specifying what information can be released and to whom. Once a patient's consent is acquired, documentation can be sent to another healthcare provider or to comply with court orders, such as in response to a subpoena.

Patients, on the other hand, always have the right to their records and dental professionals cannot withhold their personal information under any circumstances. If a patient requests records for personal use, we must provide them. (A patient is entitled to a copy of their billing records, clinical chart, radiographs, and if requested, study models.) Though healthcare settings can be busy and hectic at times, providing this information in a timely manner can prevent issues with dentist-patient relationships and can avoid speed bumps down the road when it comes to collaborating on treatment plans with other providers.

All dental professionals must act in accordance with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). HIPAA regulates the secure release of confidential patient information, which includes dental records, under federal law. Note that each state has its own set of rules and regulations governing the release of dental records. It is our duty as dental professionals to be aware of our state's rules and to uphold these standards to protect our patients.

Here are some simple steps to help you navigate the dental record release process:

- Obtain written patient consent
- Make sure the consent form specifies what information can be released and to whom
- Verify the requestor's identity (ask for ID or verify the requestor's credentials)
- Keep a record of the release (include date and time of release and to whom)

The release of dental records should be done with great care. Though at times it can seem like a painstaking process, it doesn't need to be when properly informed of your state's rules and regulations. Remember that sending records when needed is part of what it means to build trust with your patients as sharing personal information can make critical differences in high quality treatment and care.

For additional information read:

[FAQs About Dental Records: A Legal Perspective from MLMIC | MLMIC Insurance Company](#)