

## 6.4. Third party requests for access to personal health information

### 6.4.1. Policy

Requests for third party access to personal patient health information are initiated through receipt of correspondence from a solicitor or government agency or by the patient completing a *Request for Personal Health Information* form. Where a patient request form or signed authorisation is not obtained the practice is not legally obliged to release information.

Where our practice holds reports or other health information from another organisation, such as a medical specialist, we are required to provide access to this information in the same manner as for the records we create. We are also required to provide access to records which have been transferred to us from another health service provider.

General practice has a fundamental role in ensuring the privacy of personal patient health information. Our practice has access to and uses the RACGP's *Privacy and managing health information in general practice* handbook which aligns with current best practice and includes commentary on the *Privacy Act 1988*. It provides guidance to our practice on the management of health information in a general practice setting and includes examples of compliance with the various Health Records Acts and the *Australian Privacy Principles (APPs)*, which regulate the handling of personal information by both Australian government agencies and businesses.

Requests for access to patient health records and associated financial details may be received from various third parties including:

- Subpoena/court order/coroner/search warrant
- Relatives/friends/carers
- External practitioners and healthcare institutions
- Police/solicitors
- Health insurance companies/workers compensation/social welfare agencies
- Employers
- Government agencies
- Accounts/debt collection
- Students (medical and nursing)
- Research/quality assurance programs
- Media outlets
- International parties, and
- Disease registers.

We only transfer or release patient information to a third party once the consent to share information has been signed and, in specific cases, informed consent has been sought from the patient.

Our practice team can describe the procedures for timely, authorised and secure transfer of patient personal health information in relation to valid requests.