Learn how to protect adolescent confidentiality in age of EHRs
by Carla Kemp, Senior Editor

Editor’s note: The 2018 AAP National Conference & Exhibition will take place from Nov. 2-6 in Orlando.

Kirsten Hawkins, M.D., M.P.H., FAAP, and Ryan Pasternak, M.D., M.P.H., will lead an interactive group forum titled "Adolescent Privacy and the Electronic Health Record (I3035)" from 8:30-10 a.m. Monday, Nov. 5, in room W224F of the convention center.

Dr. Hawkins is program director, Georgetown University Hospital/Pediatrics in Washington, D.C., and a member of the AAP Section on Adolescent Health. Dr. Pasternak is associate professor of clinical pediatrics, division head, general ambulatory pediatrics and adolescent medicine, LSU Health School of Medicine, New Orleans.

In the following Q&A, Dr. Hawkins discusses session highlights and why pediatricians should attend.

Q: What are the key topics you will be covering during the session?

A: We will review confidentiality, consent, and the mature and emancipated minor as well as clinical cases regarding teens and confidential health care delivery. The session also will address issues with confidentiality in the digital age of electronic shared records.

Q: Why is this an important topic for pediatricians to learn more about?

A: Pediatricians have an obligation to understand their local laws (and state/federal laws) about confidentiality. Furthermore, they can facilitate collaborative decision-making, respect adolescent's evolving autonomy and advocate within their workplace to educate and protect adolescent confidentiality.

Q: How did you get interested in adolescent privacy issues?

A: As an adolescent medicine physician, I've always been interested in adolescent confidentiality. Over the course of my clinical practice, I have seen how the implementation of electronic health records has created challenges for the unique privacy concerns of adolescents. From 2011-'17, I served as a member of the Society of Adolescent Health and Medicine's subcommittee on electronic health records and helped draft the policy statement Recommendations for Electronic Health Record Use for Delivery of Adolescent Health Care. (Dr. Pasternak also helped draft the policy.)

Q: What is the take-home message of the session?

A: Adolescent privacy is quite complex given the various stakeholders involved and varying legal requirements that often differ from state to state. Shared electronic health records and patient portals have created unforeseen challenges in adolescent health and privacy.

Q: Is there anything else you would like to add?

A: As providers, we can explain the importance of confidentiality with our patients and families and seek parents' support for confidential communications.

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