Medical Records

Putting The Puzzle Pieces Together

Medical Records tell you a story and are most often the key to “putting the pieces of the puzzle together” to make your case. The medical record includes a variety of types of reports and notes entered over time by health care professionals, recording objective and subjective observations, assessments, orders for and administration of drugs and therapies, test results, consultations, etc.

The maintenance of complete and accurate medical records is a fundamental requirement of health care providers and is generally enforced by their licensing or certification organizations. The duration of record retention is mandated by federal law and some states have stricter requirements. There are also other factors to consider regarding length of retention, including the records of a minor and some payer requirements.

Each facility or practice type should have a Medical Record Policy that includes what their medical record consists of by category. Be aware that each department may create individualized forms that are specific to their role, unit and/or function. Having a copy of their policy will assist the reviewer to know what forms should be in a record to identify if something is missing or not done according to their policy. This will also assist in determining if perhaps a particular discipline’s records are not kept with the primary medical chart such as respiratory or care plan records.

Medical Records may be handwritten, electronic (EMR), or both depending on the facility, department and date. The electronic documentation attaches a time stamp on all entries. This time stamp will indicate if an entry was made hours or even days after the fact or if the documentation was altered after the initial entry.

Different software's vary when saving and printing. If it appears that notes are missing you may want to confirm that indeed all notes are printed related to a typical record request. I had a situation where we had requested all records and did not see notes that addressed an infant’s tolerance of a change in respiratory equipment. We re-requested the respiratory notes and still did not get what I would have expected to see. When I made a visit in person to review records I was informed that not all nursing comment notes were printed with the typical method they used to produce records and that the records clerk needed to go in and specifically print this record type. While this is a flaw in the software or perhaps training of staff it is helpful to know this can happen and can influence the information you are relying on to support your case. After receiving the additional records part of our theory was definitely effected.

(Cont. on page 2)
Tips to consider when requesting records:

Medical Record request forms can be important to getting everything you need.

1. If clients obtain the records you must realize key components could be missing.
2. Appropriate release of information forms must accompany all requests to maintain HIPPA compliance.
3. If appropriate, release of information should include psychiatric and AID’s information. It will not be sent without specific request.
4. Include all “handwritten and EMR” records on request.
5. Include all records that may be kept separate from the primary medical chart i.e. respiratory notes, billing records, etc.
6. Ask if they can print the records in different formats so that you can choose how you wish to receive them to simplify a review.
7. Ask if there is a cost for printing the records. If it is an option you may wish to preview the records first to determine if you really need all of them.
8. If there are multiple hospitalizations, specify only those dates for which you require the records related to your review.

General Chart Categories

- Consent for treatment
- Financial Information
- History & Physical
- Progress Notes
- Nursing Notes
- Physician Orders
- Care plans
- Medication List 
- Administration Record
- Procedural Notes
- Consultations
- Education
- Therapy Notes PT/OT/ ST
- Respiratory Notes
- Diagnostic results
- Social Service Notes
- Discharge Notes