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The Role of Caldicott Guardians

As a result of technological advancements, it is far easier to share client data and personal information between and within services. However, this can bring about confidentiality issues. To address this, the Caldicott report has outlined a set of principles and guidelines around data protection and dissemination for health organisations to adhere to in order to minimise and address confidentiality breaches and complaints.

Other regulatory bodies also provide guidelines for data handling such as the Information Governance (IG). However, the IG have a strong legal approach and mind-set towards information sharing and data protection, adhering to the Data Protection Act more stringently. Professionals in health organisations can become Caldicott Guardians (CG) and would adhere to the legal framework of data protection and security, but parallel to this, would consider how to resolve the situation ethically by applying the Caldicott principles and acting compassionately towards their clients and their data. A CG understands that trust is the cornerstone to how they should operate and although confidentiality is crucial, it may need breaching if it could lead to being the cause of the failure of a service; the case of Baby P is an example of how strictly adhering to confidentiality led to service failure. Having said that, the CG works on the idea that although confidentiality may be breached for the safety of the client, the clients trust should never be breached.

The seven principles in which the CG should ensure a health service is adhering to are: to justify the purpose(s) of every proposed use or transfer of patient identifiable information, do not use patient information unless it is absolutely necessary, use the minimum patient identifiable information necessary, access to it should be on a strict need-to-know basis, everyone with access should be aware of their responsibilities, to understand and comply with the law and to understand that the duty to share information can be as important as the duty to protect patient confidentiality.

A CG is likely to be an experienced and knowledgeable health professional that is competent in approaching confidentiality issues. They may have a deputy to oversee their responsibilities while away and are advised to register as a CG in order to be regulated accordingly. Regulators expect a well-led organisation, with all members knowing who the CG is and their role in the service, in order for the role to be effective and utilised by staff. They are to ensure up-to-date Caldicott principles and guidelines are being adhered to and importantly should record any incidents and complaints in Caldicott logs and learn from them. Through regular analysis the

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complaints may highlight reoccurring Caldicott issues allowing the CG to change or administer training anchored around the reoccurring issues to furnish the knowledge and capabilities of their team and effectiveness the service.

References:

Information obtained from the Healthcare Conference 'Caldicott Guardians for Beginners' on 20th April 2016 by speaker Christopher Fincken, Chairman of UK Council of Caldicott Guardians.