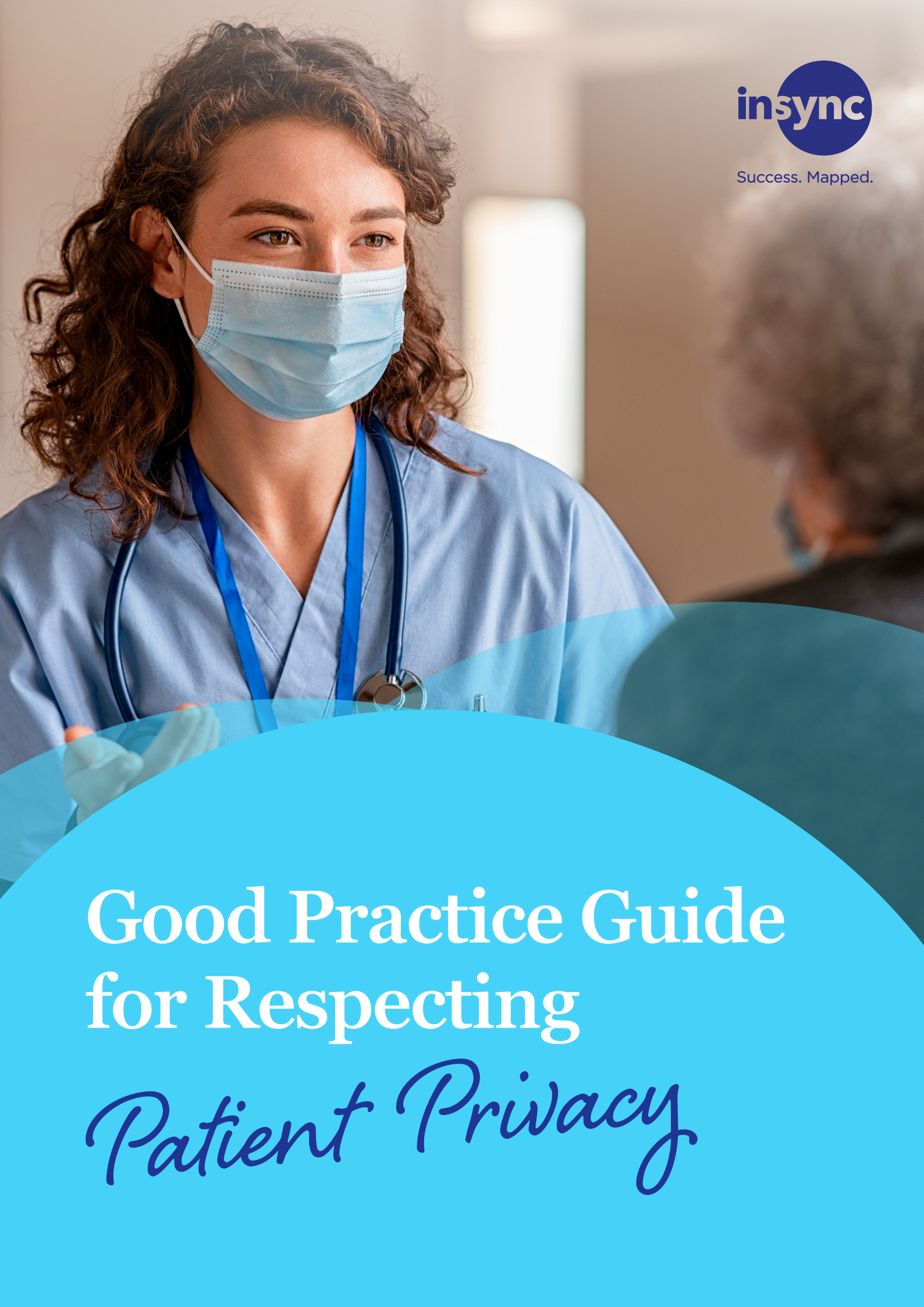




Success. Mapped.

A woman with curly brown hair, wearing a light blue surgical mask and a blue stethoscope around her neck, is shown from the chest up. She is wearing light blue scrubs. The background is a blurred clinical setting. A large, semi-transparent blue circle is overlaid on the bottom half of the image, containing the title text.

Good Practice Guide for Respecting *Patient Privacy*

This good practice guide outlines the key improvement suggestions for protecting and managing patients'/clients' privacy and confidentiality within the healthcare setting. These guidelines can be applied to all healthcare settings, including emergency departments, inpatient, and outpatient. However, healthcare providers must consider the environmental and social factors that differ between service settings. Remember, patient privacy is not just an ethical responsibility, but it also directly impacts healthcare outcomes, making your role even more crucial.



Patient/client *privacy* and *confidentiality*

All healthcare services, including emergency departments, inpatient, and outpatient, have an ethical responsibility to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of patients and clients. This crucial task, which includes the secure regulation and distribution of patients'/clients' personal information and respecting their physical privacy, is reliant on the attitudes and actions of healthcare providers. Patients/clients may have concerns about how healthcare organisations and health professionals may use and process their medical data and personal information. To address these concerns, health services must have clear and comprehensive policies and procedures that provide a framework for protecting and respecting patients'/clients' privacy and confidentiality. As a healthcare provider, you play a vital role in this process. You should be aware of these policies and procedures and ensure you understand the importance of following and implementing them throughout your practice.

Improvement *Suggestions*



Consider the following key good practice suggestions for providing patient/client privacy and confidentiality. These suggestions are explained in detail on the following pages:

1

Ensure patient information is protected and secure

2

Providing patients/clients with adequate and reliable resources regarding their privacy and confidentiality rights

3

Establish protocols and expectations that respect personal privacy and confidentiality

4

Maintain transparency with patients/clients regarding the sharing of their information

5

Acknowledge and respond promptly to patients'/clients' privacy or confidentiality concerns

1. Ensure patient information is protected and secure

- Being mindful when you are required to share or discuss a patient's/client's personal information. This involves talking in a secure environment away from public spaces.
- Do not discuss patient/client information with others who are not involved or concerned with their care.
- Ensure that patient medical records are secured away safely, including both digital and paperback. For example, ensure medical records aren't displaced or incorrectly saved/stored.
- Ensure there is a standard response for employees who receive calls from individuals other than known contacts asking about a patient. This may involve using a standard script that all healthcare workers can use. Redirect appropriately.
- The establishment of clear policies and procedures around data collection, usage, storage and sharing. This involves the appropriate disposal of patient data. For example, the use of confidentiality bins.
- Staff need to have ongoing training regarding the handling of patient/client data. This includes clearly outlining what expectations of the staff and how they need to manage personal information in their everyday roles, as well as giving staff access to reliable resources.

2. Providing patients with adequate and reliable resources regarding their privacy and confidentiality rights

- Patients/clients should receive a clear explanation of their rights and entitlements concerning their privacy and confidentiality upon admission. This includes a written copy and a clear explanation from staff.
- The rights regarding patient/client privacy and confidentiality should be easily accessible and visible. This includes being located on the health service website, waiting rooms, hallways, reception etc.
- Staff should be open to discussing these rights with the patient, including the right to seek alternative treatment and care or decline treatment.

3. Establish protocols and expectations that respect personal privacy and confidentiality

- Establishing good privacy and confidentiality stems from good leadership and governance. Ensure that leaders and governance structures encourage a culture that values privacy and confidentiality. This may include:
 - Implementing mechanisms that consistently communicate privacy issues to senior management.
 - Treating personal information and privacy as something valuable to the health organisation, and therefore, needs to be respected, managed and protected.
 - Allocating privacy and confidentiality roles and responsibilities. Involving those in leadership roles.
- Staff should respect the dignity and modesty of the patient/client. This includes only exposing the required areas of a patient's body and ensuring all other areas are physically covered as much as possible during procedures. This includes asking the patient/client if they want family or visitors to be present during treatment or care.
- Staff should warn patients/clients before entering their space and give them a moment to respond, such as knocking on the door or calling out and pausing before entering the patient's room. This also includes staff communicating clearly to patients/clients when carrying out treatment that involves touching them.
- Consider environmental surroundings, such as keeping the curtain or door closed with a patient. Sensitive procedures or treatment may need to be approached differently, such as in a private space or room away from crowded or general areas.
- Ensure that patients/clients have access to gowns or hospital wear that is inclusive for their size. This also involves collaborating with the client on what makes them feel most comfortable during treatment and care.

4. Maintain transparency and partnership with patients/clients regarding the sharing of their information

- Encourage staff to involve the patient in transferring care or medical information to another health professional or employee, such as carrying out handovers at the patient's/client's bedside.
- Staff should always communicate to the patient the importance of privacy and confidentiality. This helps establish trust and confidence between consumers and staff.
- Encourage staff to build therapeutic relationships with patients/clients. This involves the use of active listening and respect when a patient/client is expressing their concerns. This will help foster a trusting relationship between the patient/client and the healthcare worker.
- Healthcare workers must be mindful of patients'/clients' concerns and take them seriously. If appropriate, this may involve adjusting practice.

5. Acknowledge and respond promptly to concerns of privacy or confidentiality

- Patients/clients need to be provided with clear direction and information from staff on where and who they can contact if they have any concerns about their privacy or confidentiality being compromised.
- Staff should be encouraged to report any incidents where they believe that a patient's/client's privacy or confidentiality is compromised. This involves:
 - Setting up routine monitoring systems that maintain, track and evaluate the health services standards for patient/client confidentiality and privacy.
 - The development of an effective response plan. This is an important step in ensuring you have the appropriate measures in place to respond to and manage privacy or confidentiality breaches. For example, a data breach. This also needs to include clear guidelines for accountability.
- Clear feedback systems should be in place so that complaints and concerns can be addressed efficiently and effectively. This process may involve the following steps:
 - Informing the patient/client if they are unaware that their privacy or confidentiality may have been compromised.
 - The provision of an apology.
 - Support or compensation for the patient/client, depending on evidence of loss or damage.
 - Changes to policies and procedures to prevent similar breaches from happening again.

