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Cell phone photos are easy, maybe too easy, to take —check rules before shooting patients

Cell phone pictures by physicians or any nonfamily member are prohibited at SHC (and LPCH) unless taken with the patient's own phone at the patient's request.

"Because evolving technology and cultural values make it so easy, many of us are accustomed to use our phones to make pictures throughout the day, often for sharing with friends, colleagues, and perhaps, patients or families," said Bryan Bohman, chief of staff. "But we are in a healthcare institution where patient confidentiality and privacy are vital to our patients' well being and protected under HIPAA regulations."

The SHC and LPCH Compliance Manual, in a January 2008 policy entitled "Photographing of Patients by Physicians, Staff Members, Patients and/or Visitors" states: "Physicians, staff members, volunteers and business associates are not allowed to take photographs of patients or visitors with a personal cell phone or other portable electronic device except at the request of a patient with the patient's portable device" [emphasis added].

In 2010, taking photos of cadavers or organs was banned at the School of Medicine after many students began using their phones to take such photos routinely, said autopsy chief Donald Regula.

That rule prompted a review of existing hospital policies regarding cell phone photos, Bohman said.



The SHC policy spells out procedures for authorized taking and use of photos, using a phone or other camera, under a wide range of circumstances. Here are some highlights:

n A process is outlined to secure patient and/or family permission for photos or patient information for use for research or educational purposes.

n Photos by and for media use are covered under a discrete protocol. For further information on seeking permission, contact Gary Migdol, director of communication, gmigdol@stanfordmed.org, (650) 723-1262, or page an on-call representative at (650) 723-6661.

n Family and friends may take pictures of patients with their permission for personal use.

n Patients may request that photography be halted at any time. If a patient requests halting of a photo requested for medical or research purposes, the patients' physician should be contacted.

A copy of the hospital photography policy is available here: [2_11PhonePolicy.pdf](#)



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