

New to Care Sector Information Governance? What you should know

What is Information Governance?

You have probably heard of Clinical Governance or Social Care Governance, which provide a way for organisations and individuals to continuously improve the quality of health and social care and ensure high standards of care are provided. You may be aware of Research Governance, which defines the good practice guidelines necessary to ensure health and social care research complies with scientific and ethical standards. Senior personnel in large organisations will also be involved in Corporate Governance, which is the way that organisations are able to achieve their business objectives and meet the necessary standards of accountability and integrity.

Information Governance sits alongside these other governance frameworks and is to do with the way organisations process or handle information. It covers personal information, relating to patients/service users and employees and corporate information such as financial and accounting records.

Information Governance provides a framework to bring together all the rules, whether legal or simply best practice, that apply to the handling of information, supporting:

- high quality care
- compliance with the law
- implementation of central advice and guidance, and
- year on year improvement

Information Governance allows organisations and individuals to ensure that information is handled legally, securely, efficiently and effectively in order to support delivery of the best possible care.

At its heart, Information Governance is about identifying a high standard for the handling of information and giving organisations the tools to achieve that standard.

What does Information Governance cover?

Information Governance provides a consistent way for organisations and their employees to deal with the many different standards and legal rules that apply to information handling, including:

- data protection and confidentiality
- information sharing for care and for non-care purposes
- information security and information risk management
- information quality
- records management for both care and corporate information

Why should you learn about Information Governance?

Learning about Information Governance helps ensure that everyone follows best practice guidelines on information handling and adheres to legal and professional obligations. Meeting the same Information Governance standards in all care environments means that organisations can trust one another and improve the way that they work together to deliver care.

Failure to understand the requirements of Information Governance leaves individuals and organisations open to challenge, complaints and potential litigation.

Information Governance Supports:

Information Rights: The law provides individuals with:

- The right to privacy and confidentiality and to expect care organisations to keep their confidential information safe and secure
- The right of access to records made about them and to have any inaccurate facts corrected
- The right to be informed about how their information is used
- The right to request that their confidential information is not used beyond their own care and treatment and to have their objections considered. Where their wishes cannot be followed, to be told the reasons why and the legal basis for overriding their objection

Information Responsibilities: The law requires organisations to:

- Respect patient/service user information rights and seek consent where this is needed to provide a lawful basis for information use and sharing
- Wherever practicable share information with other bodies where this might facilitate care providing the sharing is lawful and the individual concerned hasn't objected
- Protect personal information with technical and organisational security measures proportionate to the sensitivity of the information
- Ensure personal information is accurate and kept up to date where necessary
- Only use information for the purposes it was collected to support (research is an exception)

Delivering benefits for those you are caring for:

- Greater trust in health and social care working practices
- An improved understanding of how information about them is used and their rights
- Greater control over information about them and
- Confidence that their confidential information will not be shared inappropriately
- Confidence that information will be shared to support their care
- The care provided will be supported by complete and accessible records that are available when and where needed (e.g. in the event of an unplanned attendance/admission)

Delivering benefits for organisations:

- Those in your care will be more open to sharing personal information with you
- Care professionals will be able to rely on improved information to make decisions about care, treatment and services and communicate effectively with other professionals involved in providing services for the patient/service user
- The risks posed by duplicate records will be minimised
- Organisations will be correctly paid for the care and services they provide
- Care can be more centred on those who require it, integrated across multiple organisations rather than delivered through organisational silos
- Organisations can evidence legal and policy compliance and minimise information risks
- Processes and procedures for information and records are efficient and effective
- Employees are provided with guidance and appropriate, effective training