



# County Technical Assistance Service

Published on e-Li (<http://eli.ctas.tennessee.edu>)

October 27, 2021

## Medical Records

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We hope this information will be useful to you; reference to it will assist you with many of the questions that will arise in your tenure with county government. However, the *Tennessee Code Annotated* and other relevant laws or regulations should always be consulted before any action is taken based upon the contents of this document.

Please feel free to contact us if you have questions or comments regarding this information or any other e-Li material.

Sincerely,

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## Table of Contents

Medical Records .....	3
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## Medical Records

**Reference Number:** CTAS-1376

Medical and mental health records on the inmate's physical condition on admission, during confinement, and at discharge shall be kept in a separate file from the inmate's other facility records. The medical record shall indicate all medical orders issued by the facility's physician and/or any other health care personnel who are responsible for rendering health care services. These medical records shall be retained for a period of ten (10) years after the inmate's release. [Rules of the Tennessee Corrections Institute, Rule 1400-1-.13\(21\)](#).

Jail personnel have a duty to maintain complete medical records on each inmate. Records should also be kept on drugs administered to inmates. *Nicholson v. Choctaw County*, 498 F.Supp. 295, 309 (S.D. Ala. 1980) (The failure to keep adequate medical records constitutes a danger to the lives and health of inmates.). See also *Dawson v. Kendrick*, 527 F.Supp. 1252, 1306-1307 (S.D. W.Va. 1981) (The Eighth Amendment has also been held to be implicated when a prison's "inadequate, inaccurate and unprofessionally maintained medical records" give rise to "the possibility for disaster stemming from a failure to properly chart" medical care received by prisoners.), citing *Burks v. Teasdale*, 492 F.Supp. 650, 676 (W.D. Mo. 1980).

Whether prisoners have any constitutional privacy rights in their prison medical records and treatment appears to be an unsettled question. In *Doe v. Delie*, 257 F.3d 309 (3d Cir. 2001), the Third Circuit Court of Appeals joined the Second Circuit in recognizing that the constitutional right to privacy in one's medical information exists in prison.

We acknowledge, however, that a prisoner does not enjoy a right of privacy in his medical information to the same extent as a free citizen. We do not suggest that Doe has a right to conceal this diagnosed medical condition from everyone in the corrections system. Doe's constitutional right is subject to substantial restrictions and limitations in order for correctional officials to achieve legitimate correctional goals and maintain institutional security.

Specifically, an inmate's constitutional right may be curtailed by a policy or regulation that is shown to be "reasonably related to legitimate penological interests." *Turner v. Safley*, 482 U.S. 78, 89, 107 S.Ct. 2254, 96 L.Ed.2d 64 (1987).

*Id.* at 317. See *Powell v. Schriver*, 175 F.3d 107, 112 (2d Cir. 1999).

In *Anderson v. Romero*, 72 F.3d 518 (7th Cir. 1995), the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals recognized a "qualified constitutional right to confidentiality of medical records and medical communications" outside of prison but concluded that it was an open question as to whether the right applied in the prison setting. *Id.* at 522. The court concluded that prison officials were entitled to qualified immunity because, if such a right existed, it was not clearly established in 1992 or in 1995. *Id.* at 524.

The Sixth Circuit does not recognize the right to privacy in one's medical information in any setting. In *Doe v. Wigginton*, 21 F.3d 733, 740 (6th Cir.1994), the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals explicitly held that the right of privacy is not implicated at all by prison official's disclosure of an inmate's medical status. *Id.* at 740. See *J.P. v. DeSanti*, 653 F.2d 1080, 1090 (6th Cir. 1981) (concluding that "the Constitution does not encompass a general right to nondisclosure of private information"); *Tokar v. Armontrout*, 97 F.3d 1078, 1084-1085 (8th Cir. 1996) (noting that prisoners do not have a constitutional right to confidentiality of their medical records). See also *Reeves v. Engelsjerd*, 2005 WL 3534906, \*4 (E.D. Mich. 2005) ("Although other Circuits have recognized a constitutional right to privacy in the information in one's medical records, the Sixth Circuit has specifically held that such a right generally does not exist.").

The Tennessee Supreme Court has held that the confidentiality of records is a statutory matter left to the legislature. *Doe v. Sundquist*, 2 S.W.3d 919 (Tenn. 1999), citing *Tennessean v. Electric Power Bd. of Nashville*, 979 S.W.2d 297, 300-301 (Tenn. 1998); *Thompson v. Reynolds*, 858 S.W.2d 328 (Tenn. Ct. App. 1993).

Pursuant to T.C.A. § 10-7-504(a)(1), the medical records of county inmates shall be treated as confidential and shall not be open for inspection by members of the public.

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