How to Manage Records in Your Office

Many departments store manual records in their office. This document provides advice on the best ways to manage these records. Guidance on electronic records is available separately (on the Records Management intranet site).

Benefits of managing records

- Save storage space in your office
- Allows easy, efficient access to information
- Comply with legislation and Information Governance requirements, such as the Freedom of Information Act 2000, Data Protection Act 1998, and the Public Records Act 1958.

Responsibilities - Key points

1. Encourage use of a central filing system rather than each member of staff having their own set of files.
2. Ensure that all staff understand their responsibilities for record keeping and filing: this should be covered in Information Governance requirements in their job description.
3. Ensure that an explanation of the local filing system is included in local induction procedures.
4. Allocate overall responsibility for management of the filing system to one or two individuals. Although all staff must be responsible for their own filing into the filing system, it is useful to ensure that there is overall management of the filing area to avoid chaos.

Storage of records - Key points

1. Ensure that all staff who need to access the records are able to do so
2. Keep the records in a secure area (e.g. locked filing cabinet or locked store) if they contain sensitive or confidential material.
3. The storage area should be clean, tidy, and away from water threats (e.g. sinks, toilets, pipes, radiators) and fire hazards (e.g. electronic equipment, kitchen equipment).
4. Do not leave records on the floor. This is a health and safety hazard, leaves the records in greater danger (e.g. if there is a flood) and encourages pests.
5. Ensure that the storage area complies with manual handling and health and safety requirements. If boxes are used, or shelves above head height are used, a manual handling risk assessment should be undertaken, as there are limits on the amount of weight staff should be

expected to lift. Be aware that large boxes can become extremely heavy when filled with paper.

6. Keep reference / library material (e.g. publications, magazines, manuals, "reading" / "for information"), separate from Trust records.
7. Space taken up by files can be reduced in various ways. For example, removing papers from lever arch files and using treasury tags or plastic binders ("archive clips") to secure the papers. If boxes are used, use the same size of box to make the best use of space.

Titling and naming of files - Key points

1. Have a documented, consistent titling system which all staff understand. The naming/titling system should be clear enough to enable a new member of staff to easily locate the relevant file after a short explanation.
2. File the records in a sensible order, e.g. alphabetical or chronological. It is often useful to have a combination of the two systems, e.g. complaints A-Z 2005, complaints A-Z 2006, etc. If only alphabetical filing is used, the file system can become too large and it is often difficult to identify and extract the older records when the time has come to destroy them.
3. For patient records, it is often important to separate out the adults' records from the records of children, because these are sometimes required to be retained for a longer period. Ensure that the year of the last episode of care is easily identifiable e.g. by using a coloured "year sticker" on the individual's file, or by filing patients seen each year separately. More guidance is available in the Trust core guideline *Good Health Recordkeeping Guide.*
4. If reference codes are used, ensure that the codes are logical and that there is a document which enables you link the reference code to a full explanatory file title (e.g. Tender 00/04, SUI 255, Complaint SA/54). It is a good idea to include the year in reference codes, as this will enable you to easily separate out the older records. For example, Tender 05/04 is the 5^{th} tender in 2004.
5. Avoid abbreviations in file titles.
6. Mark file titles clearly on file covers.
7. Include covering dates of the record.
8. If the filing system is subject based, keep an electronic list of files on the shared drive. Ensure that staff know where it is and keep it updated. This should list file titles, covering dates, location (e.g. shelf number), and retention/action date.
9. Do not use 'miscellaneous' or 'general' as file titles. Records in such files are effectively lost as the description is meaningless.

Loaning / Tracking of file location - Key points

1. When files are removed from the filing system by a member of staff, ensure that this is recorded so that the location of records can be tracked. For example, leave pre-printed forms in the filing area which staff can complete when they remove a file, stating the name of the file, who removed the file and the date. This form should then be put in place of the file itself on the shelf. When the file is returned, the form of paper can be removed from the shelf. If an audit trail of access is required, file the pieces of paper together.
2. If a more formal method of tracking/loaning files is required, the Modern Records Management team can offer advice.

Retention / disposal of records - Key points

1. Files should be closed when the activity to which they relate has been completed. It is a good idea to open new files for each year. If a file becomes too large, close the file and create a second volume, but clearly label the files as volume 1 and volume 2.
2. The Trust Policy on the Retention and Disposal of Records lists how long Trust records should be retained, and what to do at the end of this period (e.g. destroy or send file to Trust Archivist).
3. When a file is closed it should be clearly marked as closed, with the covering dates of the file clearly shown. Mark the action date on the records in accordance with Trust Policy e.g. Destroy Jan 2007. You can mark this on individual files or the closed files can be separated out from the current or active files, by putting those due for disposal at the same time in the same box.
4. The Trust Records Centre provides storage for corporate/administrative records which are closed and which need to be retained for longer than 3 years. See the Records Management intranet site for more information (details below).
5. In order to keep control of the storage area, it is important to regularly and routinely review and extract those records which can be destroyed or which can be sent to the Trust Records Centre for long-term storage. This can be done annually or if storage space is very limited, monthly may be possible for some records. Advice can be obtained from the Modern Records Management team.
6. If destruction of records takes place this must be in accordance with the Trust records retention policy and the destruction should be recorded (e.g. summary lists of what has been destroyed and when).
7. Records should be destroyed as confidential waste.

Contacts / Resources

Each of the departments below have information on the Trust intranet site (found via the A-Z index).

Department	*Advice on*	*Contacts*
Records Management / Modern Records	Management and retention of Trust records Trust Records Centre (Prescot St)	Catherine Redfern x.18-4866 Sarah Coombs x.18-4361
Health Records Department	Management of medical records / Hospital patient case notes	Christine Poole x.15-7012
Information Governance	Confidentiality, Data Protection, use of patient information, data quality, information security	Nicola Gould x.18-4691 Martyn Steers x18-4791
Trust Archives	Historical records and artefacts, Hospital Museums	Samantha Farhall (SBH) x.15-8152 Jonathan Evans (RLH) x.14-7608

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Version Number: 1.0
Date: 24 August 2006