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FAX 97-19

Field Operations Memo 97-15
February 12, 1997

TO: Local Office Staff
FROM: Joyce Sampson, Assistant Commissioner for Field Operations
RE: Confidentiality of Case Record Information

Introduction The confidentiality of information in the case record is protected by the provisions of 106 CMR 100 through 108: Fair Information Practices. All recipients are guaranteed confidentiality; it is extremely critical, however, that case workers take the utmost care in guarding confidentiality when the recipient specifically requests it. If a recipient reports circumstances showing the need to increase confidentiality safeguards, such as domestic violence, the worker should offer the recipient the opportunity to safeguard case information.

Special Confidentiality Coding To help workers identify cases in which increased confidentiality safeguards are required, a new code has been developed for use in block 16 of the PACES PID, Multiple Address. This code, **H**, is defined as "Confidentiality Alert." On the PACES RECD screen it will appear next to an arrow to the right of the zip code field.

Effective immediately, code H is to be entered in block 16 of the PACES PID if :

- a recipient requests special confidentiality; or
- a recipient reports circumstances which indicate a need for increased confidentiality safeguards, the worker explains the restrictions surrounding code H, and the recipient requests to be coded as such.

Be sure the recipient understands that **no information regarding the case whatsoever will be given over the telephone, either to the recipient or anyone else, for cases coded H.**

**Requests for
Information on
Cases Coded
“H”**

When a request for information is received by telephone, staff must first check the case via the PACES RECD screen or the case record to determine if the case is coded H. If so, no case-specific information is to be discussed by telephone. Any discussions about the case must take place in the local office and the recipient must be prepared to present a photo ID in order to confirm his/her identity.

**General
Confidentiality
Guidelines**

Workers are reminded that even under ordinary circumstances no information regarding a case should be given out via telephone unless the worker is absolutely certain as to the identity of the caller. When in doubt, ask the caller a particular question based on case record information which only the recipient would know, such as mother's maiden name, or call the recipient back at the phone number listed in the case record.

Furthermore, no specific case information is to be given to individuals other than the recipient (eg., landlord, school official, charitable organization representative, employer) without the written consent of the recipient.

Questions

If you have any questions about this memo, have your designee call the Policy Hotline at (617) 348-8478.