

## **Client Information & Records - A Guideline -**

Clients have a right to expect that we will:

- ⤴ Only collect the information we need to assist them and to be good stewards of donated funds;
- ⤴ Share their information only in ways that are in their best interests and the best interests of the Society;
- ⤴ Protect the information so that it is not available to anyone that does not have a right to access it;
- ⤴ Dispose of it in an appropriate and timely manner.

In our dealings with doctors, lawyers, and others who assist us with personal matters, we expect and have a right to the same limits and safeguards.

The following guidelines are meant to assist you in ensuring that the rights and best interests of your clients are protected in an appropriate and consistent way.

### **Client Record Form**

The amount and type of information collected and the ways in which is recorded and stored varies considerably from conference to conference. The attached form is meant to bring greater consistency to this process and to guide you in your decisions about what information is necessary and appropriate.

The Client record Form is available in a manual version and an electronic version. The suggestions for using the manual version are attached. If you choose to use the electronic version or would like to try it out, please request a copy by contacting Anar (416-364-5577, ext. 222).

The key features of the form are:

- ⤴ A standard, easy-to-use format;
- ⤴ A structure that helps you to collect only the information that's necessary and appropriate;
- ⤴ A form that allows for easy storage and retrieval.

### **Confidentiality**

As indicated above, clients have a right to expect that you will share their information only in ways that are in **their best interests** and/or the **best interests of the Society**. They also have a right to see what you have written and what's in their file.

In the best interests of the **client**, we might feel the need to share personal client information with other **members of our conference**.

- ⤴ This is quite appropriate when done with care, respect, and the best of intentions;
- ⤴ One of the strengths of the conference is that we are able to benefit from the experience and wisdom and insights of our fellow Vincentians;
- ⤴ Only initials would show in any minutes;
- ⤴ The pastor is deemed to be a member of the conference and is, therefore, privy to information about those being served, as needed and as requested.

In the best interests of the **client**, we might feel the need to share personal client information with members of the particular council.

- ⤴ Although we might rightly seek the guidance of the particular council president or executive member in dealing with a difficult case, it would rarely be necessary or appropriate to actually identify the client by name in such discussions.

In the best interests of the **client**, we might feel the need to share personal client information with **agencies or professionals**.

- ⤴ This would only be done with the knowledge and permission of the client, except in cases of suspected child abuse or other dangerous, illegal behaviour.

In the best interests of the **Society**, we might feel the need to share personal client information with members of the **particular or central councils**.

- ⤴ If a client is clearly using deceit and deception to gain material support from the Society, the conference president might decide that it is appropriate to advise the particular council so that appropriate steps can be taken to address the matter.

Note: Central may, from time to time, wish to collect non-identifying information so as to make better informed decisions. This is quite appropriate since there would be no way to know which clients the information refers to.

## **Storage of Client Information**

In storing client information, you want to achieve two things.

1. You want the information to be easily accessed by members before a visitation, so they can refresh their memories, and after visitations, so they can file any notes resulting from the visit.
2. You want to be sure that the information is secure and available only to those who have a right and need to access it.

Conferences will find various ways to do this effectively and appropriately. Following are some suggestions but any method that accomplishes both of the requirements above is acceptable.

1. The form and other material is kept in a three-ringed binder, with clients filed alphabetically and the binder organized using alpha dividers.
2. The binder is kept in a secure, easily accessed spot (example, the rectory office or the home of the president or secretary).
  - a. Before visiting a client, the members check the file to see what was done on the last visit, whether any promises were made, and to refresh memories re. person's situation.
    - i. If one pair of Vincentians is going out on an evening, they could pick up the binder and check the files of the client(s) they are visiting. They would, of course, **not take the binder into any residence**.
    - ii. If one pair is assigned to handle all calls for a week, they would likely hold on to the binder throughout that period.
  - b. After visiting the client, the member would update the file, as appropriate.
3. How the binder is secured will vary but it must be secured in such a way that it is only available to persons who have a right to access. This would mean:
  - a. If stored in a house, it must be locked up so that family members do not have access;
  - b. If stored in the rectory or church office, it must be locked so that only conference members have access;

### **Retention & Destruction of Records**

1. Client records must be retained for seven years after the last contact, but conferences might choose to retain records for a longer period.
2. Records will be shredded when being destroyed. This can be done at the parish or the files can be sent to Central for shredding.
3. Archival material may be retained at the conference or preferably sent to Central for storage.

*These guidelines will be piloted in one conference in each particular council prior to implementation. It might also be wise to make the form optional for at least the first year and then modify the form and process based on feedback before required use.*