

Patient Models of Confidentiality

Pamela Sankar, PhD
Assistant Professor of Bioethics, Center for Bioethics,
University of Pennsylvania

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Dr. Sankar presented pilot data from interviews with patients concerning the patient's perceptions of medical confidentiality. Often patients assume that their medical information is being taken confidentially and that their doctors will omit parts of the record that the patient considers personal (e.g., information about abortions or domestic violence). Dr. Sankar stated that medical professionals cannot assume that a patient's understanding of confidentiality is the same as the view of a medical professional. A patient's view of confidentiality often reflects their own personal experiences rather than those of someone who has been educated in matters of medical confidentiality. Helpful to researchers were her comments regarding the challenges in recruiting participants for research studies.

Pamela Sankar, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Bioethics in the Department of Medical Ethics in the School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. She is also a Fellow at the Center for Bioethics, University of Pennsylvania, and a Senior Fellow at the Leonard Davis Institute of Health Economics, University of Pennsylvania. She is a highly-regarded investigator in the fields of informed consent, and genetic privacy and confidentiality. Dr. Sankar's degrees are in history of ideas, anthropology, and communications, and she has completed post-doctoral training in health services research.