



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

October 29, 2019

Ms. June B. Harden
Assistant Attorney General
Assistant Public Information Coordinator
Office of the Attorney General
P.O. Box 12548
Austin, Texas 78711-2548

OR2019-30488

Dear Ms. Harden:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Public Information Act (the "Act"), chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 793822 (PIR No. R002061)

The Office of the Attorney General (the "OAG") received a request for information pertaining to a crime victim's compensation fund claim made by the requestor's client. The OAG states it will release most of the responsive information to the requestor. The OAG claims the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.¹

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. Section 552.101 encompasses information made confidential by the Medical Practice Act ("MPA"), subtitle B of title 3 of the Occupations Code, which governs release of medical records. Section 159.002 of the MPA provides, in relevant part:

¹ We assume the "representative sample" of records submitted to this office is truly representative of the requested records as a whole. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 499 (1988), 497 (1988). This open records letter does not reach, and therefore does not authorize the withholding of, any other requested records to the extent that those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

(a) A communication between a physician and a patient, relative to or in connection with any professional services as a physician to the patient, is confidential and privileged and may not be disclosed except as provided by this chapter.

(b) A record of the identity, diagnosis, evaluation, or treatment of a patient by a physician that is created or maintained by a physician is confidential and privileged and may not be disclosed except as provided by this chapter.

(c) A person who receives information from a confidential communication or record as described by this chapter, other than a person listed in Section 159.004 who is acting on the patient's behalf, may not disclose the information except to the extent that disclosure is consistent with the authorized purposes for which the information was first obtained.

Occ. Code § 159.002(a)-(c). Information that is subject to the MPA includes both medical records and information obtained from those medical records. *See id.* §§ 159.002, .004. This office has determined the protection afforded by section 159.002 extends only to records created by either a physician or someone under the supervision of a physician. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 487 (1987), 370 (1983), 343 (1982). We have also found that when a file is created as the result of a hospital stay, all the documents in the file relating to diagnosis and treatment constitute physician-patient communications or “[r]ecords of the identity, diagnosis, evaluation, or treatment of a patient by a physician that are created or maintained by a physician.” Open Records Decision No. 546 (1990). Upon review, we find Exhibit B constitutes confidential medical records under the MPA. Accordingly, the OAG must withhold Exhibit B under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the MPA.²

Section 552.101 of the Government Code also encompasses section 562.052 of the Occupations Code. Section 562.052 provides:

A confidential record is privileged and a pharmacist may release a confidential record only to:

- (1) the patient or the patient's agent;

²We note this ruling does not affect an individual's right of access to his or her own medical records from the physician who provided treatment under the MPA, subtitle B of title 3 of the Occupations Code. *See* Occ. Code §§ 159.004, .005, .006; *Tex. State Bd. of Pharmacy*, 391 S.W.3d 253 (Tex. App.—Austin 2012, no pet.) (Medical Practice Act, subtitle B of title 3 of the Occupations Code, does not provide patient general right of access to his or her medical records from governmental body responding to a request for information under the Act).

(2) a practitioner or another pharmacist if, in the pharmacist's professional judgment, the release is necessary to protect the patient's health and well-being;

(3) the [Texas Board of Pharmacy] or to a person or another state or federal agency authorized by law to receive the confidential record;

(4) a law enforcement agency engaged in investigation of a suspected violation of Chapter 481 or 483, Health and Safety Code, or the Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act of 1970 (21 U.S.C. Section 801 et seq.);

(5) a person employed by a state agency that licenses a practitioner, if the person is performing the person's official duties; or

(6) an insurance carrier or other third party payor authorized by the patient to receive the information.

Occ. Code § 562.052. Section 551.003(10) of the Occupations Code defines a confidential record for the purposes of section 562.052 as a "health-related record, including a patient medication record, prescription drug order, or medication order, that: (A) contains information that identifies an individual; and (B) is maintained by a pharmacy or pharmacist." *Id.* § 551.003(10); *see also id.* § 562.102. Upon review, we agree Exhibit C consists of confidential prescription records that are subject to section 562.052. Accordingly, the OAG must withhold Exhibit C under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 562.052 of the Occupations Code.³

In summary, the OAG must withhold Exhibit B under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the MPA. The OAG must withhold Exhibit C under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 562.052 of the Occupations Code.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular information at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other information or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For more information concerning those rights and responsibilities, please visit our website at <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open-government/members-public/what-expect-after-ruling-issued> or call the OAG's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable

³We note this ruling does not affect a patient's right of access to the patient's own confidential record from the pharmacist or pharmacy who provided services under the Texas Pharmacy Act, subtitle J of title 3 of the Occupations Code. *See* Occ. Code §§ 562.052, .102; *cf Tex. State Bd. of Pharmacy*, 391 S.W.3d 253.

charges for providing public information under the Public Information Act may be directed to the Cost Rules Administrator of the OAG, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matthew Taylor", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Matthew Taylor
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

MHT/eb

Ref: ID# 793822

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)