

## **Keepsakes and mementos**

### **Question**

I recently discovered that our hospital has been archiving our patients' records, including pictures and memory boxes never picked up by the families, for over twenty years. The bereavement assistant also keeps two active years and two to three more years beyond that on file at the hospital. How long do you archive patients' records, photos, and memory boxes? Is there a standard amount of time that these should be held? Thank you for your time.

### **Answer**

Thank you for your excellent question. We discourage hospitals from taking responsibility of photos and keepsakes. Photos would be critical to lose, but most hospitals store them in mother's or baby's (if live born) electronic health record (rather than printing a copy). As for other keepsakes (e.g., hand or foot molds, door cards, memory boxes), we suggest you create a policy that states these types of mementos belong to bereaved loved ones and are theirs to do with as they choose. They may store them and not look at them, have other family members store them, or throw them away if they are certain they do not wish to keep them.

Occasionally, there can be delays in completing keepsakes. Families are usually in a hurry to leave the hospital, and certain logistics can prevent keepsakes from being ready for presentation to the family before discharge; therefore, you may want to include a specific time limitation in the policy for how long these items are kept. A good time for the families to pick them up may be when they come in for a postpartum appointment.

As healthcare providers, we often want to move into a "responsible" mode for these things, and it truly isn't reasonable for us to take responsibility for something that may end up being very precious. Think of what would happen if your department was to relocate and your patients' items were lost.

We hope this information is helpful to you. Feel free to contact us again if you have additional questions.