TIME TO REVIEW, UPDATE AND REVISE YOUR POLICIES & PROCEDURES MANUAL (P&P)

With a new year quickly approaching, this is an opportune time to be sure your Policies and Procedures Manual (P&P) is up to date. This Clinic Tips offers key best practice guidelines in relation to your P&P to enable you to get your “house in order” from a medical/legal standpoint.

UNDERSTANDING KEY DEFINITIONS

Knowledge of the following definitions is helpful to understanding the necessity of P&P.

Standards, Standards of Care or Standard of Practice:
These are statements of the minimum level of performance that is acceptable for a Pregnancy Resource Medical Clinic. They are the established rule for the measure of quality of services provided. In a legal setting anything that does not meet the standard of care provides the basis for a medical malpractice claim.

Policies:
These are written statements that indicate what actions are to be taken when specific situations are encountered. They provide a definitive course of action selected from alternatives to guide and determine present and future decisions.

Procedures:
These are written guidelines that state how a policy is to be implemented.

Protocols:
These are standardized descriptions of the elements of a task, procedure or process, and provide a detailed plan of a procedure.

CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING
1. When was the last time your P&P was reviewed? Key personnel – your Medical Director, your Board Chairman, your Nurse Manager and your Clinic Director, should do this annually. In the front of your P&P there is a form for each of these key persons to sign indicating that they have reviewed the P&P and have approved any changes made during the last year. All such personnel should place their initials on this page for each year that they have reviewed the document.

2. Where does your center keep the P&P? Are your staff and volunteers aware of its existence and location? Further, do they know it is critical that the P&P be kept up-to-date in the event of an OSHA visit?
3. An in-service training for all staff and volunteers should be given to alert them to the importance of the P&P. NIFLA Legal Tips September 2008 Volume XV Number 8 suggests that an exam be given to staff/volunteers as a tool for them to better understand the P&P. The in-service training should provide a review of the basic information in the P&P and each staff/volunteer should review the particulars of their area of involvement. This is also a good time to address questions and concerns. After the training each staff and volunteer should sign a statement of commitment indicating that they will comply with the P&P requirements. The signed statement should then be placed in each staff and volunteer’s personnel file. When writing P&P remember that these are based on accepted minimum medical/legal “standards of care.” Your clinic practice should meet or exceed these standards. Your P&P becomes legally binding as your center’s set of standards; therefore, they could be used against you in the event of a lawsuit.

4. What if someone in your center does not comply with the P&P? Anyone who is not willing or able to comply with the P&P should not be part of your organization, as their actions potentially become a legal and ethical liability, and put your organization at risk.

5. What is the procedure for revising P&P? NIFLA Legal Tips August 2007 (Volume XIV Number 7) describes how to properly amend P&P. Remember, outdated P&P must be kept on file in the event a concern arises from an occurrence while a previous P&P was in effect.

The NIFLA sample P&P manual was updated in Spring 2009 to reflect current information and best practices and the changes were distributed electronically to all centers. The current set of recommended P&P is on the CD included with each manual for the Limited Obstetrical Ultrasound Course. If your PRMC did not receive the electronic updates, or does not have a disc with a 2009 copyright date, please contact the NIFLA office to receive your copy (by email or disc). Upon receipt, review it along with your current P&P to determine any needed changes or additions.

You will want to be sure to access all NIFLA Clinic Tips and Legal Tips (available online at www.nifla.org) and distribute them to appropriate staff for practice implementation. Future issues of Clinic Tips will address other updated information such as OSHA Best Practices Guide: Fundamentals of a Workplace First-Aid program, confidentiality issues, and identification of gender during scanning in the PRMC.

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