Hospital Visitation Reporting Guidelines for Oklahoma Baptists

Here is an update on how churches should handle hospital visitation lists and reports. This information is from a discussion with Scott Phillips, from the BGCO, and a review of pertinent information in the Church Law and Tax Report.

- When someone provides us with information regarding an individual’s hospitalization, the person receiving the information needs to ask, “Is this information to be shared with the church?” If the answer is “yes,” than the information can be shared with the church staff and members.
- A church’s unauthorized disclosure of a member’s medical condition could constitute an “invasion of privacy.”
- The BGCO is encouraging churches not to over react.
- As long as a church “asks reasonable questions and provides reasonable protection” for the people it is ministering to there should be no problem.
- Avoid using the terms “confidential” or “private” in any communication conveying information about individuals.
- Use the following header for all email correspondence containing information about church members in the hospital. “This information for use by HHBC members only.”

Here is a little more information to help clarify what we can and cannot do regarding our comments about a visit with a church member or his/her medical condition.

Basically, we need to keep things the way we are currently doing them. According to information I have been able to find, discussing the specifics of someone’s medical condition without their express permission could create some unnecessary liability for the church. In other words, if we make a visit and want people to pray for a specific need, we should first ask for permission to share their situation with people who will pray for them.

Here are some examples to illustrate the difference:

**The Right Way to comment about a visit:**
**Bill Smith** – Baptist-1111 (member/Doe FLOCK)
I had a delightful visit with Bill this afternoon. He really appreciates the prayers and support he has received from the church during his hospitalization.

**John Doe** – Baptist 1111 (member/Smith FLOCK)
During my visit with John today, he asked me to share with you this prayer request. Pray that God would give the doctors wisdom and direction as they review John’s test results and with the decisions they will be making regarding his care.

**The Wrong Way to comment about a visit:**
**John Doe** – Baptist -1111 (member/Smith FLOCK)
John’s cancer is much worse than anticipated and the doctors don’t expect him to live much longer. The only thing we can do now is to pray for a miracle.

Originally received as e-mail to all HHBC hospital visitors on 01/26/04 from Wally Weaver. If you have any questions, contact Wally at wally@hhbc.com.