

Greenwich Hospital

What is the File of Life?

PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET

What is the File of Life

The File of Life is a tool created by the Greenwich Emergency Medical Services (GEMS) to help members of the community maintain a current written list of daily medications and a current health history.

Why should I use the File of Life?

It is not always easy to remember the names of all your medications or the specific reasons why you are taking them. Additionally, it can be very hard for your doctor, other healthcare workers, or emergency medical technicians (EMT's) to obtain accurate medical history information if you are unconscious and/or do not have a family member or caregiver available to speak on your behalf.

As a result, some of your medications or the correct doses of your medications may not be ordered while you are in the hospital. This confusion can be prevented by maintaining a written record of your current medication and health history on the File of Life.

How do I fill out the File of Life?

The File of Life is not difficult to complete. Use a pencil so that the information can be easily updated as changes are made in your medical plan.

- On the front, there are spaces to complete demographic information, such as your name, address, and emergency contacts.
- There is also a place on the front to fill in the date of when you last updated your information. It is very important to update your file whenever there is a change in your medications or medical condition so that the information is kept current.
- Additionally, the front contains spaces to fill in the medications you are taking along with the dose and frequency (number of times you take the medicine each day). In addition to prescription medications, you should also include over-the-counter medications, such as aspirin or Tylenol, vitamins, and herbals that you may be taking regularly.
- Remember to write down the reason why you are taking each medication.
- At discharge, you will be given a list of all the medications you are to continue taking at home. Use this list to fill in the File of Life.
- On the back of the File of Life are spots to fill in any surgeries you may have had and/or any medical conditions that you may have.

- There is also a section for any allergies. This should include allergies to medications as well as to other things, such as foods, bee stings, and mold.
- On the bottom of the second side there is also room for the name of your medical insurance company and policy number, along with other information such as Medicare or Medicaid number. This is helpful when you cannot find your insurance card in an emergency.

Once my File of Life is completed, where do I keep it?

- Your File of Life folds up into the size of a 3 x 5 card.
- It comes with a red pocket to slip the file into. The red pocket has a magnet on the back so that you can put your File of Life on the front of your refrigerator.
- If the File of Life pocket does not stick to your refrigerator, place it in your bathroom medicine cabinet.
- The emergency medical workers will look in these places when called to your home to check for a File of Life.
- The emergency medical worker will either bring the File of Life with you to the hospital, or will write down the information and communicate it to the hospital health care team.
- Either way, it will provide valuable information to the hospital emergency department about you and care that you need.

When do I update my File of Life?

If you have changes in your medications or other information on your File of Life while at the hospital, it will be important to add these changes to your File of Life ***and*** change the date on the front of the File. Additionally, you should bring your File of Life with you each time you visit your doctor. This way, you can update the information if your doctor changes your medications.

Your File of Life is a valuable communication tool between you and your health care team. To be most useful, your File of Life should be kept up to date with any changes.

Additional copies can be obtained from either Greenwich Hospital or Greenwich Emergency Medical Services.

Source: Greenwich Emergency Medical Services, Greenwich, CT.
Institute for Healthcare Improvement. 100k Lives Campaign. Retrieved March 2006 from www.ihl.org/IHI/Programs/Campaign

For more Patient Fact Sheets, see the Greenwich Hospital web site at www.greenhosp.org and Click on Patients & Visitors, then Patient Education