



Health Information Management (HIM) Frequently Asked Questions

How long does Betty Ford Center retain my medical records?

In accordance with California state law, Betty Ford Center maintains medical records for a period of seven (7) years from the time of discharge, at which point records are destroyed if there is no further activity.

What is a Program Attendance Letter?

A Program Attendance Letter simply states the date of admission, date of discharge, program name, and discharge status. It is often used to verify program completion for school, employment, court, parole, etc. There is no charge for a Program Attendance Letter.

How do I obtain copies of my medical records or a Program Attendance Letter?

Patients may obtain copies of medical records or have records sent elsewhere, but only by written request. You must complete an [Authorization to Release Protected Health Information](#) form. During treatment, releases are coordinated by case managers and technicians in the hall. After discharge, the blank form can be [printed from our website](#) or you can contact the HIM Staff to mail, fax, or e-mail it to you. The completed form **MUST** be returned to us with your original signature. The form **CANNOT** be returned to us via fax. These additional measures are important to ensure the protection and security of your confidential health information. The form must be filled out in its entirety. You must check the boxes to specifically identify what records are being requested.

When can I request my records and when will the copies be mailed?

You may request your records at any time after discharge. If you recently discharged, your request will be held until your medical record is complete in approximately two weeks. After the record is complete, it normally takes approximately seven to ten days to process a request for medical records. ***Please keep these timeframes in mind and allow sufficient time if you need copies for court, parole officer, lawyers, employers, Employee Assistance Programs, insurance companies, etc.***

Will I be charged for copies of my medical records?

Yes. The charge is based on the number of copies pursuant to federal and state guidelines. It is based primarily on the number of pages copied at 25 cents per page, plus postage or expedited ship, etc. The cost generally averages \$25 to \$75. There is no charge for a Program Attendance Letter.

Will you send my records via Fedex or other overnight carrier?

You may provide us with your Fedex account number, or we can add a charge to the copy fee. If you prefer a different overnight carrier, please include the completed airbill and shipping pouch with your completed release. Please note that carriers such as Fedex will not ship to a PO Box. You must include a street address on the release form if you wish to use an expedited carrier.

Will you send my records via fax or e-mail?

Medical record security issues prevent us from faxing or e-mailing protected health information. Upon receipt of a valid release, we will send medical records via U.S. Mail, Fedex, or other overnight carrier (see above).

How will I know if my request is denied and what are the common causes of denial?

If your request is denied, you will be notified in writing. You will also be provided with an explanation for the denial, along with instructions on how to correct the issue. The most common causes of denial are incomplete release form and inability to verify signature. For added security, the signature on the release is verified with other documents a patient signed during treatment. Another common cause for denial is not specifying which records are to be released.

What do I need to send to my insurance company to initiate a claim for reimbursement?

Each insurance company is different, and we encourage you to call your carrier prior to initiating a claim. In general, most insurance companies require a UB-04 insurance claim form, along with copies of your medical records. The UB-04 form is available through our Financial Services department after discharge. It is a computer-generated form with distinctive red printing. You may complete an [Authorization to Release Protected Health Information](#) for us to send the records directly to you, and then you can forward them to your insurance carrier to supplement your claim. If you are requesting records be sent directly to an insurance company, it is important you verify to whom and where the records should be sent, as this is usually different than the address printed on your insurance card.

If your question was not answered here, please contact us:

Betty Ford Center Health Information Management

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HIM Office Hours: Monday through Friday, 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM Pacific Standard Time. After hours, please leave a confidential voice mail, and we will return your call.