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## Record Keeping

Current legislation indicates that anything that refers to a client by name or other means may be regarded as part of the client record for legal purposes.

- All paper records, including process and case notes, should be kept securely locked, preferably in a fireproof cabinet or container within a secure area. This applies to client records kept both within and outside of the organisation's premises. In the event that the organisation deems it necessary or unavoidable that its counsellors keep records at home or in another place outside of the organisation's premises, the above security measures should be put in place.
- Any process notes taken to support the counsellor's work e.g. in supervision should be kept secure and destroyed when they have served their purpose. Clients should not be identified in supervision, case studies or research, except with their explicit and informed decision.
- Data on clients held on a computer (or in other electronic forms such as a personal organiser, personal digital assistant etc.) should be made secure from access by others either directly from the computer terminal, or from a modem, cable network or other means of access by the use of secure passwords, data encryption, 'firewalls' or similar means of securing the site. This measure applies to data held electronically in the organisation's premise or in other locations, including the homes of its counsellors.
- There are no specific legal recommendations for the period of time to keep client records. However, a substantial number of organisations recommend that all records be kept for a period of six years (plus one additional 'safety' year) after the last contact with a client. Other organisations keep records only until the end of the contact with the client. A different record system again may need to be considered for records that apply to children.
- In the case of video and audio recordings, COSCA's guidance for data recording should be followed. Please see COSCA's website for a copy of this guidance entitled: COSCA Guidelines for Data Recording: Use and Storage of Tapes, Discs & Electronic Material.
- Paper records should be disposed of as carefully as they are stored. These records should be shredded or incinerated to ensure their destruction and illegibility. Electronic records should likewise be disposed of to prevent improper disclosure of information.
- Initial working agreements on record keeping should be drawn up and agreed with each client. Clients should have the right to access information stored on them.
- An organisation seeking COSCA Recognition needs to demonstrate that it has adopted a systematic and detailed method of record keeping, including a statement on how long records are kept and the other issues covered above.

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