

## **Confidentiality: Phone Contact With Family Member Ruled Improper.**

A staff member in a family-practice physician's office was told to contact the patient about her test results just received from the lab.

The lab report indicated the patient was suffering from severe anemia. It was necessary for the patient to contact the doctor's office immediately for medical follow up.

The staff member used a number from the file to phone the patient's husband at work. She elaborated about the fact that his wife's lab test report indicated severe anemia and thus she needed to get in touch with the doctor immediately.

The patient sued the medical clinic for violation of medical confidentiality.

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***The task delegated to the office staff member was simply to locate the patient and have the patient contact the physician's office.***

***That task could and should have been performed without having to reveal confidential medical information.***

COURT OF APPEALS OF GEORGIA  
September 6, 2006

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The Court of Appeals of Georgia was willing to uphold the basic premise of the lawsuit, leaving open the question how the patient would be able to prove she suffered actual harm as a result of the clinic staff member's improper conduct.

Just telling the husband it was very important for the patient to contact the doctor immediately would and should have sufficed in this situation. **Howell v. Shumans**, \_\_ S.E. 2d \_\_, 2006 WL 2555979 (Ga. App., September 6, 2006).