



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

April 29, 2013

Ms. Neera Chatterjee  
Office of General Counsel  
The University of Texas System  
201 West Seventh Street  
Austin, Texas 78701

OR2013-07026

Dear Ms. Chatterjee:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Public Information Act (the "Act"), chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 485618 (OGC # 14872).

The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas (the "university") received a request for all documents related to misconduct allegations made against a named resident. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. You also inform us you have notified the attorney for the named resident of the request and she has objected to the release of any information she submitted to the university on behalf of her client. *See* Gov't Code § 552.304 (providing interested party may submit written comments regarding why information should or should not be released). We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.<sup>1</sup>

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." *Id.*

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<sup>1</sup>We assume the "representative sample" of records submitted to this office is truly representative of the requested records as a whole. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 499 (1988), 497 (1988). This open records letter does not reach, and therefore does not authorize the withholding of, any other requested records to the extent those records contain substantially different types of information than those submitted to this office.

§ 552.101. This exception encompasses information that other statutes make confidential. Section 160.007 of the Occupations Code provides, in relevant part:

(a) Except as otherwise provided by this subtitle, each proceeding or record of a medical peer review committee is confidential, and any communication made to a medical peer review committee is privileged.

Occ. Code § 160.007(a). “Medical peer review” is defined by the Medical Practice Act, subtitle B of title 3 of the Occupations Code, to mean “the evaluation of medical and health care services, including evaluation of the qualifications and professional conduct of professional health care practitioners and of patient care provided by those practitioners.” *Id.* § 151.002(a)(7). A medical peer review committee is “a committee of a health care entity . . . or the medical staff of a health care entity, that operates under written bylaws approved by the policy-making body or the governing board of the health care entity and is authorized to evaluate the quality of medical and health care services[.]” *Id.* § 151.002(a)(8). Section 161.032 of the Health and Safety Code further provides, in relevant part:

(a) The records and proceedings of a medical committee are confidential and are not subject to court subpoena.

...

(c) Records, information, or reports of a medical committee, medical peer review committee, or compliance officer and records, information, or reports provided by a medical committee, medical peer review committee, or compliance officer to the governing body of a public hospital, hospital district, or hospital authority are not subject to disclosure under [the Act].

...

(f) This section and Subchapter A, Chapter 160, Occupations Code, do not apply to records made or maintained in the regular course of business by a hospital, health maintenance organization, medical organization, university medical center or health science center, hospital district, hospital authority, or extended care facility.

Health & Safety Code § 161.032(a), (c), (f) (footnotes omitted). A “medical committee” is defined as any committee, including a joint committee, of a hospital, a medical organization, a university medical school or health science center, a health maintenance organization licensed under chapter 843 of the Insurance Code, an extended care facility, a hospital district, or a hospital authority. *See id.* § 161.031(a). The term also encompasses “a committee appointed ad hoc to conduct a specific investigation or established under state or federal law or rule or under the bylaws or rules of the organization or institution.”

*Id.* § 161.031(b). Section 161.0315 of the Health and Safety Code states “[t]he governing body of a hospital [or a] university medical school or health science center . . . may form . . . a medical committee, as defined by Section 161.031, to evaluate medical and health care services[.]” *Id.* § 161.0315(a).

The precise scope of section 161.032 has been the subject of a number of judicial decisions. *See, e.g., Memorial Hosp.-The Woodlands v. McCown*, 927 S.W.2d 1 (Tex. 1996); *Barnes v. Whittington*, 751 S.W.2d 493 (Tex. 1988); *Jordan v. Fourth Supreme Judicial Dist.*, 701 S.W.2d 644 (Tex. 1986). These cases establish that “documents generated by the committee in order to conduct open and thorough review” are confidential. This protection extends “to documents that have been prepared by or at the direction of the committee for committee purposes,” but does not extend to documents “gratuitously submitted to a committee” or “created without committee impetus and purpose.” *See Jordan*, 701 S.W.2d at 647-48; *see* Open Records Decision No. 591 (1991) (construing statutory predecessor to Health and Safety Code § 161.032). Section 161.032 does not make confidential “records made or maintained in the regular course of business by a . . . university medical center or health science center[.]” Health & Safety Code § 161.032(f); *see McCown*, 927 S.W.2d at 10 (stating that reference to statutory predecessor to Occ. Code § 160.007 in Health and Safety Code § 161.032 is clear signal that records should be accorded same treatment under both statutes in determining if they were made in ordinary course of business). The phrase “records made or maintained in the regular course of business” has been construed to mean records that are neither created nor obtained in connection with a medical committee’s deliberative proceedings. *See McCown*, 927 S.W.2d at 9-10.

You state the submitted information involves the work of two medical committees. You submit information showing the submitted information was created or considered by an ad hoc committee composed of a residency program director, two additional faculty members and a graduate medical education administrator. The submitted information shows this ad hoc committee was created pursuant to the university’s rules in order to investigate and review grievances by resident physicians. You further state some of the submitted information was created or considered by a residency education committee. You inform us the residency education committees uphold the university’s mission of providing the best healthcare possible and offering in-depth training within a specific specialty to medical school graduates. You explain the university has twenty-one residency programs and that each residency program has a program director and a residency education committee composed of faculty members within the relevant medical specialty. Further, you explain these committees conduct peer reviews for quality assurance purposes and to ensure the standards of care are met in relation to residents. Thus, we agree these committees constitute medical committees for the purposes of section 161.032 of the Health and Safety Code. *See generally McCown*, 927 S.W.2d at 8 (term “medical committee” is broadly defined). We understand the committees utilized this information in making their recommendations and/or decisions regarding the resident at issue. Upon our review, we conclude the submitted information constitutes confidential records of a medical committee under section 161.032

of the Health and Safety Code that must be withheld from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular information at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other information or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For more information concerning those rights and responsibilities, please visit our website at [http://www.oag.state.tx.us/open/index\\_orl.php](http://www.oag.state.tx.us/open/index_orl.php), or call the Office of the Attorney General's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for providing public information under the Act must be directed to the Cost Rules Administrator of the Office of the Attorney General, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,



Ana Carolina Vieira  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

ACV/ag

Ref: ID# 485618

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)