

This aid helps to find information that might identify an individual to a third party in content submitted to BMJ journals for publication.

What to do

Judgement is needed to evaluate the degree to which an individual may be re-identified, taking into account factors such as the nature of the material and any consent for publication* or preferences about the content which has been provided by the individual.**

1. Review the content and identify information which may increase the risk of re-identification
2. Remove information that is unnecessary to make the medical point
3. Consider the potential harms to the individual of any remaining potentially identifying information which is necessary for the content
4. Consider whether consent for publication is needed and feasible to obtain
5. A final judgement about the suitability of the content, the adequacy of de-identification, and consent for publication is made by the editors

* Pay particular attention to identification of children and other vulnerable groups who cannot provide consent themselves and are more vulnerable to harms, including online.

** Individuals can be patients, carers, relatives, research participants, members of the public, or any other relevant persons referred to in the content.

ALMOST ALWAYS REMOVE

Information that poses a high risk of identifying an individual

- **Patient name**
First or last name, full name, birth name, parent's birth name, or widely-known alias
- **Identity number**
Passport number, social security details, NHS or other medical record number

DON'T FORGET TO CHECK IMAGES

Photographs, x-rays, laparoscopic images, ultrasound images, pathology slides, or multimedia files such as video and audio

- **Text and metadata**
Some images contain the patient's name, date of birth, hospital number, date of imaging and/or location where the photo was taken. This information should be removed from the image.
- **Facial and other distinguishing features**
Images that include faces and/or other distinguishing features (such as birthmarks or tattoos) should be cropped to show only what is needed. Consent for publication is required for facial images.
- **Nudity and/or images including the genitalia or chest**
To protect privacy, these images should be cropped where possible.
- **Biometric data**
Retinal scans, facial geometry, fingerprints. Advances in technology may increase the risk of re-identification.

! Always crop images to the maximum extent possible
! Do not use blurring or black bars to de-identify images

CONSIDER REMOVING

Information that could identify an individual when it appears alongside other details

The more information that is included, the higher the chance of re-identification. BMJ may contact authors for their perspective if multiple pieces of information are present.

- **Dates of particular events**
Birth, death, life events, hospital admission, discharge date, diagnosis. We suggest removing exact dates, and considering how critical it is to include exact years.
- **Place of birth**
- **Occupation**
Pay attention to unusual jobs, or exact job titles.
- **Details of heritage, such as ethnicity and/or race**
- **Personal beliefs and values**
- **Address or location of the individual, healthcare professionals, or authors**
References to a specific hospital or healthcare facility, village, town, city, county, province, state relating to the patient or the author (particularly if the authors are in close proximity). This information may be inferred from the affiliations of the authors.
- **Age**
Consider the necessity of using precise ages, compared with an age range or an indication of the age, such as 'a toddler'.
- **Medical details which are unusual alone, or when taken together**
Rare medical conditions, combinations of conditions
- **Genetic information or pedigree charts**
Rare conditions or where extensive genetic information or multigenerational pedigree charts are included, or coupled with narrow geographic information.
- **Other identifying details**
For example, details about family and family history, initials, birthmarks, and tattoos