Limits and Restrictions on the Right to Information on One’s Health

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ABSTRACT

The article is devoted to the analysis of doctrinal approaches to determining the essence of limits and restrictions on the exercise of the right to information on one’s health. The scientific positions on determining the legal nature of the limits and restrictions of the right to information on the state of one’s health have been analyzed, based on which the ratio of the ways of legal influence and legal regulation has been established. Legal restrictions as a means of legal influence take into account the interests and motives of a person who needs to acquire a certain good through subjective law. If the restrictions are enshrined in the methods of legal regulation through permissions, prohibitions, and commands in the provisions of the law, determine the lawful pattern of behavior, establish permissible or prohibited ways of exercising the right to proper education, they should be recognized as the limits of the law. It has been determined that the restrictions on the exercise of the right are the circumstances that precede certain behavior within the law, in the presence or absence of which it is allowed or prohibited to exercise certain powers freely and autonomously, i.e. the legal facts that are provided by the hypothesis of law and that determine the procedure or grounds which constitute the content of the right to information on the state of one’s health. It has been concluded that the limits of exercising the right to information on one’s health are determined by technical (equipment and mechanisms), social, and legal means, which should be understood as the frames of the individual’s ability to collect, use, store, disseminate, and protect the information on one’s health established by law, acts of civil law and agreements, which are determined by the content of this right.

INTRODUCTION

In Ukraine, the formation of civil society and the constitutional state is constantly underway, and human rights in their systemic connection with the state appear like its most important components and verifiers. The question of the limits and restrictions of personal non-property rights is one of the most difficult ones in legal science. Its complexity lies in the fact that the limits of the right that an individual faces in the process of exercising their personal non-property right and in our case the right to information on one’s health, always restrict human freedom.

MAIN TEXT

Based only on the definition of the word “limit”, it can be concluded that the limits of the exercise of the right to information on one’s health are the frames of the permissible behavior of an individual in exercising the right to information about the state of their health. In Ukraine, Art. 13 of the Civil Code of Ukraine establishes the general requirements for the exercise of rights by an individual: “A person shall exercise their civil rights within the limits specified by the agreement or civil legislation acts”. When exercising their rights, a person shall be obliged to refrain from actions that could injure the rights of others, harm the environment or the cultural legacy. Actions of a person aimed at hurting other persons as well as abusing the right in any other way shall not be allowed. When exercising their civil rights, a person shall follow moral norms of the society. The use of civil rights for the purpose of unlawful competition restriction, abuse of monopoly position in the market as well as unfair competition, shall not be allowed. In the event that a person does not meet the aforementioned requirements, the court may commit them to terminate abusing their rights as well as apply other implications established by the law” [1].

Thus, the legislation of Ukraine establishes certain limits for the exercise of subjective rights, and this, in turn, indicates that a person cannot freely exercise their rights but must act within the legally established limits. In addition, in case a person violates the legally defined limits of exercising their subjective rights, their behavior shall entail legal consequences provided by law. Hence, it is very important to comply with statutory limits in the exercise of one’s subjective rights, but the latter must be clearly established by law.

The doctrine of civil law expresses several approaches to understanding the limits of the exercise of civil rights. Thus, M.M. Maleina understood the limits of the exercise of the law as a set of criteria that clearly delimit the scope of the permissible person’s behavior, which do not regulate in detail the different options for the exercise of the right in question [2].

In turn, Y.O. Michurin noted that the limits of civil rights determine the lawful conduct of a person and the degree of protection of civil rights, because the actions of a person within civil rights are under legal protection, and actions
committed outside the law are not subject to legal protection [3]. M.O. Stefanchuk summed up all the opportunities that a person is able to acquire in connection with the legal consolidation of their rights. The concept of “the limits of law”. He also pointed out that an important aspect in the study of this problem is the separation of the content of such a concept as “the limits of the exercise of the law”. Due to the fact that sometimes the concept of “limits” and “restrictions” can be identified, but still the ways, in which an authorized person can acquire the opportunities contained in the legal consolidation of these rights that are provided by acts of civil law, they should be considered “the limits of the exercise of the law” [4].

O.O. Punda pointed out that the limits of legal regulation of a certain phenomenon (the corresponding limit of the exercise of the right) are determined by the content of such a right, and the content is formed by separate structural elements [5].

Yet, it is necessary to take into account the approach of M.O. Stefanchuk, who noted the following: “Establishing the limits of the exercise of subjective civil law is not a restriction of these rights themselves, but is only a consolidation of the principle of equality of all people in their rights, and therefore, everyone should be given an equal opportunity to exercise their rights. The limits of law do not exclude certain powers, but only restrain the authorized person in exercising their subject right. They restrain in time, place, space, and on some other grounds” [4]. Thus, all individuals are equal in their rights in the exercise of their rights and, therefore, everyone should be given an equal opportunity to exercise their rights. The limits of law in turn do not exclude some of their powers, but only hinder the exercise of the right to information on their health on certain grounds.

The limits of the exercise of the right to information on one’s health are, first of all, ensured by the introduction of categories of the information with limited access, namely confidential information on one’s health. Unlike the open information, in regards to the information about the state of one’s health, the participants in civil legal relations do not have the opportunity to freely collect (receive), use, disseminate, store confidential information on the state of an individual’s health – only per their consent, except when defined by their right to information on their health. They are given equal opportunity to exercise their rights, and the limits of law in turn do not exclude some of their powers, but only hinder the exercise of the right to information on their health on certain grounds.

In view of the aforementioned, we believe that the frames of opportunities of an individual, in addition to legal means, may also be preconditioned by technical (i.e. the presence or absence of the necessary equipment for treatment and diagnosis, lack of certain mechanisms and impossibility of their replacement in certain medical institutions and diagnostic centers); and social (for example, a certain financial situation of an individual) means. Thus, the limits of exercising the right to information on one’s health are determined by technical (equipment and mechanisms), social, and legal means. In the civil law doctrine, it is debatable to distinguish between such categories as “limits” and “restrictions” on the exercise of subjective civil rights. Characterizing the restriction of subjective civil law, we note that according to the academic glossary, “restriction” is a rule, a guideline that restricts someone’s rights [7].

M.O. Stefanchuk noted that the concept of “restriction of the exercise of subjective civil rights” should include both the behavior of another person and the actions of relevant bodies endowed with power, which are aimed at preventing persons from fully exercising their subjective civil rights. An important feature of restricting the exercise of a subjective civil right is that it does not depend on the will of the bearer of that subjective right. It should be noted that the “restriction” is not a reaction to the behavior of the exercise of their subjective right, but to other (usually illegal) behavior [8]. Similar view is held by E.O. Michurin, who, as a result of conducting a certain study, identified the restriction of law as a mechanism of legal regulation aimed at protecting the rights of society and other authorized persons, and as a system of civil remedies, as well as the possibility of certain statutory prohibitions, obligations or permissions to influence the narrowing of the content of subjective civil law [3].

We believe that the frames of opportunities of an individual, which most fully describe the concept of restrictions on the exercise of subjective civil rights and clearly indicate that the restrictions do not depend on the requirements of the subject of law, but directly depend on the requirements of other subjects, the content of which is provided by current legislation. We also consider it necessary to listen to O.O. Punda who noted that in the exercise of rights, the need for restrictions associated with the competition of interests of individual subjects, and thanks to them as means to legal regulations, will eliminate the existing competition [5].

Thus, the restriction of the right to information on one’s health is a certain system of civil means established by law, which are embodied both directly through the norms of law and regulations, in order to eliminate the existing competition between the interests of certain subjects of law, in accordance with the principles of reasonableness, good faith and fairness, the provisions of applicable law and the limits of the exercise of the right to such information. As a result, the restrictions on the exercise of the right to information on one’s health are the most legitimate interference with the right to information on one’s health, and are essentially the cases of legitimate
interference with the collection, storage, processing and dissemination of information on one’s health.

In Ukraine, restrictions on human and civil rights and freedoms are possible based on the Constitution of Ukraine, laws, and international legal acts. So, in accordance with Art. 64 of the Constitution of Ukraine, the constitutional rights and freedoms of person and citizen may not be restricted, except as provided by the Constitution of Ukraine. In the conditions of martial law or state of emergency, certain restrictions on rights and freedoms may be established, indicating the term of these restrictions.

In addition, the Constitution of Ukraine imposes restrictions on the exercise of certain human and civil rights and freedoms (Article 34). Thus, the right to freely collect, store, use, and disseminate information is limited by law in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public order in order to prevent riots or crimes, to protect public health, to protect the reputation or rights of others, to prevent disclosure, which is obtained confidentially, or to maintain the authority and impartiality of justice.

Article 34 of the Constitution of Ukraine is interdependent with Art. 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, according to which everyone has the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas, regardless of frontiers, orally, in writing or through print or artistic expression or in any other form of their choice. The exercise of these rights may be subject to certain restrictions, which must be established by law and be necessary for the respect of the rights and reputation of others; to protect public safety, public order, health or morals. The restrictions on the exercise of the right to information on one’s health may include certain cases. First of all, depending on the subject whose right is limited:

1. Restriction of the right to information on one’s health directly to the individual to whom this information relates, or their parents (adoptive parents, guardians, tutors, in that case when the information on the illness of an individual may worsen the health of the aforementioned persons or harm the treatment. Thus, Part 3 of Art. 285 of the Civil Code of Ukraine establishes that if the information on the illness of the physical person can worsen the state of their health or worsen the state of health of physical persons, the citizens by part two of the article in question (parents (adoptive parents), guardians, or tutors have the right to information on the child’s or ward’s health), harm the process of treatment, healthcare professionals have the right to provide incomplete information on the individual’s health, to limit the possibility of an acquaintance of these persons with certain medical documents. Thus, the amount of information that will be provided to a particular individual, and if the patient is a minor or incapacitated, to their parents (adoptive parents), guardians, tutors, is determined by the physical and mental condition of these persons, the severity of the disease. Thus, directly Part 3 of Art. 285 of the Civil Code of Ukraine restricts the right of an individual, and if the patient is a minor or incapacitated, to their parents (adoptive parents), guardians, tutors to receive complete information on the state of health (their, the child’s or the ward’s).

However, having established this restriction, the law does not specify which conditions of the patient the medical worker has the right to report incomplete information on and does not provide the amount of “truth”, more precisely, the murderous truth, which must still be reported to the patient. Only certain moral and ethical norms indicate that a diagnosis of malignant disease or a diagnosis that indicates the inevitable onset of death may be concealed [6], that is, according to the Civil Code of Ukraine, the restriction of the right to complete information on one’s health is the right of another person (medical worker) to report incomplete information on one’s health. When exercising this right, the health care provider mainly relies on information on the nature of the disease (the more severe the disease, the more reasons the health care provider has the right to provide incomplete information), and at their discretion determines the physical and psychological state of the person, the ability without threat to their life and health to receive information about their health (the health of a minor or incapacitated).

2. Restriction of the right to information on the state of mental health of an individual, when complete information about the state of mental health of a person may harm their health or lead to imminent danger to others, suppressing the motivation to fight the disease. According to Art. 26 of the Law of Ukraine “On Psychiatric Care”, in cases where complete information about the mental health of a person may harm their health or lead to imminent danger to others, a psychiatrist or a commission of psychiatrists may limit such information. In this case, the psychiatrist or the commission of psychiatrists informs the legal representative of the person, taking into account the personal interests of the person receiving psychiatric care. The information provided or its limitations shall be recorded in medical documents.

In our opinion, a significant contribution by the legislator, while restricting the right to information on the mental health of an individual, was made by obliging health professionals in case of incomplete information to make an entry in medical documents, which to some extent will help keep health care workers from illegal providing in complete information about the patient’s health.

We consider it necessary to enshrine this provision, which concerns the obligation of medical workers to make an entry in the medical records in case of providing incomplete information about the state of health, into the Civil Code of Ukraine. It is also advisable to develop an electronic journal - a record card, which would reflect the facts of providing incomplete information on the state of health, indicating the circumstances in which the health worker to provide incomplete information, as well as mandatory to indicate the amount of information that was not provided for certain reasons, and complete health information.

3. Restriction of the right to information on the state of health of the person entering into marriage by disseminating this information.

The legislation of Ukraine enshrines the right of every person to maintain secrecy about the state of their health and non-interference in this area by others in Art. 286 of the Civil Code of Ukraine - the right to secrecy about their health. Here, the right to secrecy is higher than the right to private access to health. Another thing is the public duty, for example, of the employer, to know about the ability of the employee to perform a certain job, for example, to sell food, pack it, and process it. Ignoring this is the main cause of mass salmonellosis. Nevertheless, Art. 30 of the Family Code of Ukraine establishes mutual awareness of brides about the state of their health, which is a restriction of the right to information on the state of health of the person entering into marriage. Thus, according to Part 1 of Art. 30, brides are required to inform each other about their health.
The legislator does not include the requirement of mandatory mutual awareness of persons who have applied for registration of marriage to the list of conditions necessary for marriage, but provided for, in case of concealment of information on their health (which may result in a violation of physical or the mental health of another groom or their descendants) has the effect of invalidating the marriage [9] and to some extent limits the personal non-property right of persons (bride and groom) to information on their health.

4. Restriction of the right to protection of information on the state of health of an individual with HIV-positive status. In accordance with Part 3 of Art. 13 of the Law of Ukraine “On counteracting the spread of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)-related diseases”, the information on the results of testing a person for HIV, the presence or absence of HIV infection, shall be confidential and constitute medical secrecy. Healthcare professionals have a responsibility to ensure that confidential information on people living with HIV is properly kept and that such information is protected from disclosure and divulgation to third parties.

The transfer of information on the results of a person’s testing (information on the person’s health, the presence or absence of HIV infection) is allowed to: the person in respect of whom the test was performed, the parents or other legal representatives of such a person, other medical workers and healthcare institutions only in connection with the treatment of this person (other medical workers and healthcare institutions are allowed to transfer such information only per consent of a person living with HIV) in certain cases stipulated by the Law in question, all third parties – only by court order [10]. Thus, the law provides for the possibility of obtaining information on the status of an HIV-positive person by a court decision and is a legal restriction on the right to protection of information on the state of one’s health of a person with HIV-positive status. This is a guarantee against possible rejection and harassment of their health.

5. Restriction of the right to protection of information on the state of health of individuals who have been convicted and are in the penitentiary system of Ukraine. Punishment in Ukraine includes statutory loss and restriction of rights and freedoms, which are completely restricted or lost to convicts. These include restriction of the right to information on a person’s health: its presence or absence, statutory measure of conduct, the necessity to carry out certain free active actions to collect (receive), use, disseminate, store, and protect information. However, in case of loss and restriction of the right to free movement and freedom of action, a person is not able to freely, at their own discretion, act on the collection (receipt), use, dissemination, storage, and protection of information on their health. Confirmation of certain restrictions on the right to information on one’s health is the provisions of the Decrease of the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine, Ministry of Health of Ukraine “On approval of the procedure for providing medical care to the condemned to imprisonment” [12], which states that the procedure for access to medical records in penitentiary institutions can be carried out only in accordance with the decree of the head of this institution. Therefore, it may be possible to obtain and disseminate information on the health of the convicted by non-medical staff without the direct permission of the person to whom the information belongs. This decree does not guarantee the non-interference of non-medical personnel in medical information, nor the protection of the right to the confidentiality of information on one’s health, as well as the possible existence of HIV status.

6. Restriction of the right to information on the state of health of a person who is in the country during the imposition of a state of emergency, established to prevent riots or crimes, to protect public health or to protect the rights and freedoms of others, in accordance with the Law Ukraine “On legal regime of emergency state” [13], for the period of state of emergency such measures may be introduced as the establishment of a special regime of entry and exit, restriction of freedom of movement on the territory where the state of emergency is imposed; restriction of traffic; introduction of curfew (prohibition to be on the streets and in other public places without specially issued permissions and identity cards at set hours); quarantine and other mandatory sanitary and anti-epidemic measures; change in the mode of operation of enterprises, institutions, organizations of all forms of ownership; special rules for using communication and transmitting information over computer networks. Thus, the introduction of such measures may result in a restriction of the right to information on one’s health; its collection, storage, processing, and dissemination. For example, with the introduction of curfew, a person shall not be able to freely exercise their right to information on their health, namely – to apply to the chosen medical institution to obtain information relating to the state of health as directly their own and in cases provided by law, their child (children), ward (wards) in time. In addition, certain restrictions on the exercise of the right to information on one’s health through its dissemination may be established in the following cases:

1) In case of bringing a person to criminal, administrative, civil liability.

When conducting proceedings, namely during the receipt and evaluation of evidence, information on a person’s health may become restricted or lost to the defendant, namely, when examining information relating to the state of health as directly their own and in cases provided by law, their child (children), ward (wards) in time. In addition, the Supreme Court of Ukraine clarified certain issues that arise when examining information on the identity of the defendant, namely, when examining information on the identity of the defendant, the court must determine their age, health, behavior before committing a crime as in everyday life, as well as at the place of work or study, their past (in particular, the presence of unresolved or outstanding convictions, administrative penalties), family composition, etc. (paragraph 3 item 3 of the resolution of the Plenum of October 24, 2003, #7) [14].

Thus, the legislation of Ukraine provides for the need for the court to take into account the characteristics of the perpetrator, which can characterize them both positively and negatively, took place before, during, or after the
crime, and consider them in a certain unity of physical, psychological, social, legal properties. Namely, when the court takes into account the guilty person, information on the state of health of the individual is subject to consideration and dissemination: their state of health, the presence of certain physical and psychological defects, disability, alcohol or drug abuse, the woman’s pregnancy at the time of sentencing.

If a certain characteristic, including the characteristic of the state of health of the guilty person, is provided by the legislator as a circumstance that may mitigate or aggravate the punishment (for example, the commission of a crime by a pregnant woman or a person under the influence of alcohol or drugs intoxication), it must be taken into account when sentencing not as a characteristic of the perpetrator, but in the application of Art. 66 or Art. 67 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine.

2) In case of legally established necessary of obligatory passing of medical examinations for the purpose of the further reception of certain permissions. According to the Decree of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine “On approval of the regulations on military medical examination and physical examination in the Armed Forces of Ukraine”, medical examination is conducted in order to determine: the suitability for military service of recruits, conscripts, and indicators for their proper distribution by type of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, types of troops and military specialty in accordance with the state of health and physical development; the suitability for military service in the military specialties, diseases of servicemen; suitability of candidates for admission to military educational institutions; suitability of servicemen, conscripts, employees of the Armed Forces to work with radioactive sources and other sources of ionizing radiation, rocket fuel components and other highly toxic substances, radio equipment that generate electromagnetic fields; opportunities for military service by officers, ensigns, midshipmen, women servicemen and the residence of their family members abroad, as well as the need for long-term specialized treatment and medical examination of their family members, their transportability due to their health.

In addition, in order to comply with Art. 21 of the Law of Ukraine “On Protection of the population against infectious diseases”, the resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine approved the list of professions, industries and organizations whose employees are subject to mandatory preventive medical examinations. Accordingly, their personnel services may be acquainted, but only for establishing the possibility of holding a certain position or performing a certain job, which, in turn, is imperative to ensure the right to life, health, and safety.

Therefore, the exercise of the right to information on one’s health may also be restricted in the case of the obligation of persons who have certain intentions related to obtaining certain permissions (for military registration, permission for further military service (confirmation suitability), permission to enter military educational institutions (suitability), permission to work in certain professions, etc., in accordance with the law) to undergo mandatory examinations in order to obtain complete information on their health.

3) In case of the necessity of obtaining permission for donation. According to item 2 of Art. 14 of the Law of Ukraine “On donation of blood and its components”, the person in question is obliged to notify the relevant official of the institution or healthcare institution the known data about the transferred and existing diseases, as well as about their drug use and other forms of risky behavior inherent in them during a medical examination performed before donating blood and its components [15]. Therefore, according to the aforementioned Law, an individual is not only obliged to undergo a medical examination, but also to report the medical diseases they have suffered and the existing ones.

4) In case of the necessity of obtaining permission for adoption or guardianship. Citizens of Ukraine who intend to adopt a child shall apply with a written application for registration as adoption candidates to the children’s services at the place of residence and must submit certain documents (documents of candidates) for adoption, including the conclusion on the state of health of each applicant (Part 4 of Art. 22 of the Decision of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine “On adoption procedures and supervision on the observance of rights of the adopted children” [16]). Thus, this Decision stipulates that in case of adoption of a child by one of the spouses, the conclusion on the state of health is submitted by each of the spouses (Paragraph 3, Part 7 of Art. 22), that is, in order to obtain the adoption permission, both spouses are limited in their right to information on their state of health and are obliged to provide information concerning their state of health.

5) Restriction of the right to information on the state of one’s health if this information is socially necessary. According to item 1 of Art. 29 of the Law of Ukraine “On Information”, the information with limited access may be disseminated if it is socially necessary, i.e. is a matter of public interest, and the public’s right to know this information outweighs the potential harm from its dissemination. The same article lists the types of information that are of public interest. It includes information that indicates a threat to state sovereignty, territorial integrity of Ukraine; ensures the realization of constitutional rights, freedoms, and responsibilities; indicates the possibility of human rights violations, misleading the public, harmful environmental and other negative consequences of activities (inaction) of individuals or legal entities, etc. For example, if an individual has contracted a certain infectious disease that may spread to the environment in which the person was ill, the medical information in the Cabinet of Ministers is in the public interest, ensuring the implementation of the constitutional right of those around them, namely the right to safe for life and health of the environment (Art. 30 of the Constitution of Ukraine) informs about the disease of this person both teams and individuals who have been in contact with them [18-20].

Summarizing the above, it can be noted that restrictions on the exercise of the right to information on one’s health in some way complicate the exercise of a person’s rights, regardless of their will [21]. These restrictions establish certain cases where interference with the right to information on one’s health without the consent of a person who has the right to information on the state of their health shall be considered lawful. These restrictions are implemented in order to ensure the life and health of the person; in respect of incapacitated persons and minors; ensuring the rights and interests of other members of society; restriction of the rights of convicts; preservation of national and public security; establishing the truth in criminal, administrative and civil cases; obtaining certain permissions; the need to disseminate socially necessary information [22].
The grounds for imposing certain restrictions on the exercise of the right to information on one’s health are reflected in both Ukrainian and international law [23]. In general, the sub-institution of restricting the exercise of the right to information on the state of one’s health is a manifestation of 1) the legal balance of subjective rights with legal obligations; 2) the balance between the prevailing rights of public security and security; 3) compliance of a person’s state of health for the performance their state duties or the duties of an employee. In any case, they have a positivist basis.

CONCLUSION
Summing up, we can note that the limits of the right to information on one’s health are determined by technical (equipment and mechanisms), social, and legal means, which should be understood as the frames of the individual’s ability to collect, use, store, disseminate, and protect the information on one’s health established by law, acts of civil law and agreements, which are determined by the content of this right. It has been established that the restriction of the exercise of the right to information on one’s health can be carried out: to ensure the life and health of incapacitated persons and minors; in respect of a person who is getting married; to ensure the rights and interests of other members of society; to preserve the national and public security; to establish the truth in criminal, administrative, and civil cases; to obtain certain permissions; to disseminate the socially necessary information; as a restriction of the rights of convicts.

REFERENCES