



*A team you can trust*

## COMMUNICATION WITH PATIENTS VIA ELECTRONIC MEANS POLICY

Staff are mindful that even if patients have provided electronic contact details, they may not be proficient in communicating via electronic means and patient choice should be obtained before using electronic communication. Patients are able to obtain advice or information related to their care or appointment reminders by electronic means, where the doctor determines that a face-to-face consultation is unnecessary. Electronic communication includes: email, fax, and SMS. Practice staff and doctors determine how they communicate electronically with patients, both receiving and sending messages. All significant electronic contact with patients is recorded in the patient health records. Patients are informed of any costs incurred prior to electronic consultations.

Practice staff and doctors should be aware of alternative modes of communication used by the disabled. Patients are advised in the Practice Information sheet that they can request our written policy on receiving and returning electronic communication. Communication with patients via electronic means (e.g. email and Fax) is conducted with appropriate regard to the privacy Laws relating to health information and confidentiality of the patient's health information. Staff and Patients using email/SMS or other forms of electronic messaging should be aware that it is not possible to guarantee that electronic communications will be private. All personal health information or sensitive information sent by email must be securely encrypted. When an email message is sent or received in the course of a person's duties, that message is a business communication and therefore constitutes an official record. Internal or external parties, including patients may send electronic messages. Messages from patients or those of clinical significance require a response to confirm receipt and should be documented in the patient medial record if appropriate. Employees should be aware that electronic communications could, depending on the technology, be forwarded, intercepted, printed and stored by others. Electronic mail is the equivalent of a post card. Staff members have full accountability for emails sent in their name or held in their mailbox and are expected to utilise this communication tool in an acceptable manner. This includes (but is not limited to):

- limiting the exchange of personal emails
- refraining from responding to unsolicited or unwanted emails
- deleting hoaxes or chain emails
- email attachments from unknown senders should not be opened
- virus checking all email attachments
- maintaining appropriate language within e-communications
- ensuring any personal opinions are clearly indicated as such
- confidential information (e.g. patient information) must be encrypted.

The Practice reserves the right to check individual email as a precaution to fraud, viruses, workplace harassment or breaches of confidence by employees. Inappropriate use of the Email facility will be fully investigated and may be grounds for dismissal. The practice uses an email disclaimer notice on outgoing emails that are affiliated with the practice.