

1.1. Communication with patients by electronic means

1.1.1. Policy

Our practice is mindful that even if patients have provided electronic contact details, they may not be proficient in communicating via electronic means and patient consent needs to be obtained and documented before engaging in electronic communication. Electronic communication includes email, facsimile, and Short Message Service (SMS). Where possible, utilise the function in Best Practice that allows letters to be sent as attachments or with PINs.

Communication with patients via electronic means is conducted with appropriate regard to privacy.

1.1.2. Procedure

Our practice's primary reason for communicating electronically to patients is to issue appointment reminders and we verify the correct contact details of the patient at the time of the appointment being made.

Whilst not encouraged, our practice allows patients an opportunity to obtain advice or information related to their care by electronic means, but only where the general practitioner determines that a face-to-face consultation is unnecessary and that communication by electronic means is suitable. Our practice will only provide information that is of a general, non-urgent nature and will not initiate electronic communication (other than SMS appointment reminders) with patients. Any electronic communication received from patients is also used as a method to verify the contact details we have recorded on file are correct and up to date.

Communication with patients via electronic means is conducted with appropriate regard to privacy. Before obtaining and documenting the patient's consent, patients are fully informed through information contained in our New Patient Form online or in our practice to gain consent from the patient that they are fully aware of the risks associated with electronic communication in that the information could be intercepted or read by someone other than the intended recipient. Our practice also has an automatic email response system set up so that whenever an email is received into the practice, the sender receives an automated message reinforcing information regarding these risks.

Automated email response:

Thank you for your email. Whilst this email is regularly monitored, it should not be used for urgent communication or making appointments. If this is an emergency, please call the clinic on 03 9803 1022. We will reply to your email within 1 business day, where possible.

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. Patients are informed of any

costs to be incurred as a result of the electronic advice or information being provided, and all electronic contact with patients is recorded in their health record.

All members of the practice team are made aware of our policy regarding electronic communication with patients during induction, and are reminded of this policy on an ongoing basis. They are made aware that electronic communications could be forwarded, intercepted, printed and stored by others. Each member of the practice team holds full accountability for emails sent in their name or held in their mailbox, and they 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 are not to be opened
- Virus checking all email attachments
- Maintaining appropriate language within electronic communications
- Ensuring any personal opinions are clearly indicated as such, and
- Confidential information (e.g., patient information) must be encrypted.

Our practice reserves the right to check an individual's email accounts as a precaution to fraud, viruses, workplace harassment or breaches of confidence by members of the practice team. 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 stating:

“The information in this electronic transmission may contain confidential or legally privileged information and is intended solely for the individual(s) named above. If you are not an intended recipient or an authorized agent, you are hereby notified that reading, distributing, or otherwise disseminating, copying, or taking any action based on the contents of this transmission is strictly prohibited. Any unauthorized interception of this transmission is illegal under law. If you have received this transmission in error, please notify the sender by telephone as soon as possible and then destroy all copies of this transmission. ”