

# YOUR DOCTOR COMMUNICATION POLICY

- Our practice manages telephone calls, telephone messages and electronic messages from patients and the way we do this is:

## Policy

- Our practice endeavours to provide patients with access to timely advice or information about their clinical care via the telephone. The urgency of a patients needs are determined promptly. We aim to communicate effectively over the telephone and use simple, straight forward language and check that patients have understood what has been said.
- Electronic communication provides a useful and alternative point of access for our patients. Our patients have the option to contact or be contacted by our practice through electronic means via email and SMS. Our patients are informed of the risks associated with some methods of electronic communications and that their privacy and confidentiality may be compromised. Patients must agree verbally as or via hotdoc which is noted in their file. Our practice adheres to the Australian Privacy Principles (APPs), the Privacy Act 1988, Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic) Health Records Act 2001 (Vic). The practice may become liable for the contents of any email message under certain circumstances and therefore an email disclaimer is inserted into the signature of all practice emails. Email and SMS between the practice and the patient, including any action taken in response to the message/s are included in the patient's medical record. Our Practice uses Fax as its main communication tool.
- Our practice aims to ensure all patient messages or other communications including emails that require subsequent follow-up by a doctor or other staff member are responded to in a timely manner. All messages from patients, to patients, or about patients become part of the patient's health record, in addition to any actions taken in response to the message.
- Our aim is to facilitate optimal communication opportunities with our patients. Patients who do not speak or read English or who are more proficient in another language, or who have special communication needs are offered the choice of using the assistance of a language service to communicate with the GPs or clinical team members.
- Our practice encourages and supports the use of digital technology to enable our patient with 24-hour access to our appointment system. Our practice allows patients to book their healthcare appointment with their preferred healthcare provider online via the booking page on our website or direct with HotDoc.
- Any information and/or advice regarding clinical information or of a clinical nature is strictly handled by the nurse and GP - triaged by reception to the appropriate person within the appropriate level of attention.

## Procedure

### ▸ **Communicating by telephone**

- All telephone calls are answered by a member of the practice who must adhere to the following guidelines:
  - Staff follow the practice booking system for all patient appointments
  - Before any calls are placed on hold staff must first ask if the matter is an emergency
  - Staff follow the practice triage system for patients requesting urgent appointments
  - Staff make sure that the patient is correctly identified by using three of the approved patient identifiers
  - Family name and given names
  - Date of birth
  - Gender (as identified by the patient)
  - Address
  - Patient health record number, where it exists
  - Individual Healthcare Identifier
  - \*A Medicare number is not an approved identifier.
  - Staff are mindful of confidentiality and patient's right to privacy. No names are openly stated over the telephone within earshot of other patients and/or visitors
  - Staff members are aware of each doctor's policy on accepting or returning calls.

In non urgent situations, patient calls need not interrupt consultations with other patients, but a message containing the information is given to the person in a timely manner

### ▸ **Communicating by electronic means**

- Our practice email account for patients and stakeholders for communication with our practice is [info@yourdoctor.com.au](mailto:info@yourdoctor.com.au). Only appropriate non-clinical matters are dealt with via email exchanges.
- No consulting or advice services are conducted by email. This must be communicated face to face by a medical practitioner or other appropriate health professional unless there are exceptional circumstances.
- This email account will be routinely checked throughout the business day by the Receptionist. Email messages are forwarded to the appropriate team member for response within 24 hours.
- Our practice uses SMS messaging to remind patients of their upcoming appointments. There is no medical or identifying information used in these messages. It is the patient's responsibility to contact the practice and follow up on the message.
- Communication conducted with a patient via electronic means will be added to the patient's medical record by the team member resolving the enquiry.

▶ **Informing the clinical team of communications**

- ▶ All communications documented for a staff members attention and action, or in their absence to the designated person who is responsible for that team member's workload is contained in our appointment screen, in Medical Director Messenger, or in email.
- ▶ All details are documented in the patients file. The log records:
  - The name and contact phone number of the patient/caller
  - The date and time of the call
  - The urgent or non-urgent nature of the call
  - Important facts concerning the patient's condition
  - The advice or information received from the doctor
  - Details of any follow up appointments
- ▶ All documented communications are provided to the staff member on the day of receipt and must be responded to within a timely manner or within 24 hours.

▶ **Communicating with patients with special needs**

- ▶ A contact list of translator and interpreter services and services for patients with a disability is maintained, updated regularly and readily available to all staff at reception. These include:
  - National Relay Service (NRS) 1300 555 727
  - Auslan services 1300 AUSLAN
  - Translation and Interpreter Service (TIS) Doctors Priority Line 1300 131 450