

## COMMUNICATION

Electronic communication with patients must be conducted with appropriate regard to the privacy and confidentiality of the patient's health information.

Privacy and confidentiality training is provided as part of the new practice team members induction program; with regular updates and training provided as needed. It is the responsibility of the Practice Manager to ensure all training and training records is completed, current and stored in PracticeHub.

Our telephone system provides sufficient inward and outward call capacity and has the functionality for electronic communication (either email or facsimile). The practice has 3 lines dedicated for telephone calls and an adequate number of lines for electronic communication to service reception and all clinical staff.

A telephone line is available for the practice team to summon assistance in an emergency.

### **Managing telephone calls, telephone messages, and/or electronic messages**

Hunter River Medical Centre prides itself on the high calibre of customer service we provide, especially in the area of patient security, confidentiality, and right to privacy, dignity and respect. Team members are mindful of confidentiality requirements to ensure patient names or clinical discussions about patients are not openly stated over the telephone when within earshot of other patients or visitors.

Effective handling of patient phone calls is important. To facilitate this, reception staff are trained to:

- always gain permission from callers before placing them on hold. This gives the caller the opportunity to advise if they have an emergency.
- Answer by stating Hunter River Medical Centre, this is [your name] speaking, how may I help you today?"
- use three approved forms of identification for identifying patients over the phone
- rate the urgency of a call and manage as per the Triage Support Guide

### **SMS and email communication**

With appropriate authorisation our practice uses Short Message Service (SMS), and email to communicate with our patients via Automated Systems. We only use SMS and email communication for non-urgent recalls and reminders. Urgent concerns are notified to the patient via phone call by the doctor.

Authorisation for SMS contact requires:

- patient signature in the appropriate section of our New Patient Registration form (scanned to patient file).
- confirmation of mobile number at each visit.

The patient is informed the SMS:

- does not to include sensitive health information (e.g., pathology results)
- is included in their health record

Our practice SMS reminder system:

- records the reminder in the patient file
- allows the practice to access the record of the SMS reminders sent
- the practice has access to the patient responses to the SMS reminders

- the practice can identify an SMS reminder sent to a patient for a flagged recall or reminder and the response from the patient to ensure appropriate action is taken or when there is no responses by the patient
- If the patient does not respond to the SMS, they get an email (if email is provided) or a post mail.

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

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

"This email and any files transmitted with it are confidential and intended solely for the use of the individual or entity to which they are addressed. If you have received this email in error please notify the system manager. This message contains confidential information and is intended only for the individual named. If you are not the named addressee you should not disseminate, distribute or copy this e-mail. Please notify the sender immediately by e-mail if you have received this e-mail by mistake and delete this e-mail from your system. If you are not the intended recipient you are notified that disclosing, copying, distributing or taking any action in reliance on the contents of this information is strictly prohibited".

