

Communication Policy – Telephone and Electronic Correspondence

Policy Statement

- The practice is committed to providing clear guidance regarding the information that can and cannot be given over the phone or electronically.
- Patients can access their GP in a convenient, safe, and comfortable way if unable to make it to our centre.
- Educating staff on triaging messages and managing patient communications.
- Maintaining patient privacy and confidentiality through communications.

Information and Advice

- The practice may contact patients via telephone, calls, SMS, fax, post and/ or email regarding appointment confirmations or changes, health reminders and recalls, follow-up of results where appropriate, and practice information.
- During non-business hours a recorded message provides information about emergency care, after-hours services and when the practice will reopen.
- We have provisions in place for GPs to be contacted after hours for life threatening, urgent matters or results.
- We can an internal process in place for patients that require Translating and Interpreting services.

Communications

Telephone

- Reception staff may provide administrative information such as opening hours, appointment availability, and billing policies. Clinical advice, diagnoses, treatment information, or test results are only provided by clinical staff.
- Reception staff are trained to identify messages requiring urgent clinical attention. Urgent messages are referred to a clinician, advised to attend the centre, or directed to emergency services where appropriate. Non-urgent messages are documented and securely forwarded to the clinical team for review.
- Where clinically relevant information is discussed, a note will be recorded in the patient's medical record.

Fax

- Faxes received that are patient related are imported directly into the patient's file. These are then reviewed and actioned by the doctor. Any urgent patient-related faxes are immediately handed to the doctor or if that doctor is not available another doctor in the practice will review the fax. All non-patient related faxes are given to the relevant staff members.
- All outgoing faxes will be accompanied by a practice cover sheet advising details of who the fax is addressed to, fax number, number of pages and confidentiality and privacy notice.

SMS

- SMS messaging may be used for appointment reminders, health reminders, and health recalls. Patients are advised to keep their mobile contact details current.
- The practice cannot guarantee confidentiality if another person has access to the patient's mobile phone.
- The practice uses secure transmission through Medical Director and HOTDOC.

Email – Incoming and Outgoing

- Email communication may be used where appropriate; however, patients are advised that email is not a fully secure method of communication and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.
- Patients are discouraged from using email for urgent medical matters and should contact the practice by telephone if urgent care is required.

- Patient consent to receive information electronically may be implied where the patient initiates electronic communication or provides an email address for correspondence.
- Automatic replies are used to acknowledge receipt of emails and advise patients of expected response times.
- Where possible, documents such as referrals, medical certificates or results reviewed by a doctor are sent through the practice management system. When documents are sent manually, staff confirm the patient's email address and will send documents using password protection where appropriate.

Website and Online Information

- The practice website provides information including opening hours, services, doctor profiles, fees, appointment booking and contact details. Online information is reviewed regularly to ensure it remains accurate and up to date.

Postal

- Letters may be sent to patients for health reminders, recalls or practice information, particularly where patients have opted out of electronic messaging.
- Incoming mail is opened daily and patient-related correspondence is scanned into the patient's medical record for clinician review.

Communication Failure and Backup

- If communication technology fails (for example video telehealth interruptions), the practice may switch to a telephone consultation, reschedule the appointment, or arrange an in-person visit. Patients will be informed of alternative arrangements where necessary.

Staff Training and Education

- Reception and administrative staff receive training on this policy during induction and periodically thereafter.
- Training includes recognising messages requiring clinical attention and ensuring appropriate escalation.

Patient Education

- Patients will be educated about the communication channels available to them as required, including the use of health portals to access information and communicate with their healthcare team.

Policy Review and Update

This policy will be regularly reviewed and updated to reflect changes in technology and legislation and to align with RACGP standards. This will ensure the evolving needs of our medical centre are met.

All staff members are expected to familiarise themselves with and adhere to the principles outlined in this policy.

Feedback and Complaints

The practice welcomes patient feedback and will address complaints appropriately.

Patients may contact the practice by phone on 03 9741 2033 or by email at admin@werribeemmedical.com.au.

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