

Purpose

To ensure Centre staff are aware of email and electronic communication protocols within our practice.

Policy

Coffs Harbour Women's Health Centre 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 before engaging in electronic communication. Electronic communication includes email, facsimile and Short Message Service (SMS).

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

Procedure

Our Centre'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. If patients have consented to receiving recall reminders and upcoming health promotion groups/events by email or sms, we may at times send this via electronic means.

Whilst not encouraged, our Centre allows patients an opportunity to obtain information related to the Centre and our services by electronic means, however no clinical or treatment advice will be given by email, nor can appointments be booked via email. Our Centre will only provide information that is of a general, non-urgent nature and will not initiate electronic communication (other than SMS appointment reminders – including health recall reminders, or upcoming health promotion activities) 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 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.

The Centre's information leaflet also advises patients how to access our email and electronic communication policy. Any urgent issues should be dealt with directly by telephoning the clinic during business hours, emails are checked daily and responses can take from 24-48 hours during working days.

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 Centre 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 Centre 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 Centre 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 Coffs Harbour Women's Health Centre team. Inappropriate use of the email facility will be fully investigated and may be grounds for dismissal.

The Centre uses an email disclaimer notice on outgoing emails that are affiliated with the Coffs Harbour Women's Health Centre stating "This e-mail is for the use of the intended recipient only and may contain information that is confidential. If you are not the intended recipient or have received this e-mail in error please notify the sender immediately and delete all electronic and hard copies of this transmission together with any attachments. Please consider the environment before printing this e-mail."

Policy Review

Current as of: 21/03/2024

This policy will be reviewed regularly to ensure it reflects the current processes and procedures and current legislation requirements.

Next review date 21/03/2025