

5.5. Communication with patients by electronic means

5.5.1. 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 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

5.5.2. 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 within the privacy policy and information provided verbally of the risks associated with electronic communication in that the information could be intercepted or read by someone other than the intended recipient.

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.