



## **Privacy, Social Media & Results Policies**

This policy aims to explain clearly how personal information about you and your health is recorded and managed in this practice. Your doctor will be happy to discuss this with you.

Your doctor needs information about your past and present health to provide you with high quality care. This practice will make sure that you are able to discuss your health with your doctor in private.

The Information is called 'Personal Health Information' if it concerns your health, medical history past or future medical care and if someone reading it would be able to identify you.

We may collect your personal information when you, phone the clinic, send us an email, reply to an SMS, make an online appointment, or communicate with us using social media platforms.

This practice follows the guidelines of the *Handbook for the Management of Health Information in Private Medical Practice*. This Handbook was produced by the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners and the Committee of Presidents of Medical Colleges with the support of the General Practice Computing Group. The Handbook incorporates the provisions of Federal and State Privacy Legislation. This means that your Personal Health Information is kept private and secure.

### **Medical Records**

Your health practitioners will do their best to make sure that your medical records:

- Are accurate, comprehensive, well-organised, and legible.
- Are up to date.
- Have enough information to allow another doctor to care for you.
- Do not contain offensive or irrelevant comments about you.
- Contain a summary of your care; and
- Can be used to remind you, with your permission, to return for follow up, checkups and reviews.

### **Email Policy**

Please note that our email service is not encrypted, and therefore we cannot guarantee the security of our email communications. There is a risk that emails and/or attachments could be read by someone other than the intended recipient (for example, because of widespread hacking, or because someone accesses your email account).

For this reason, we discourage patients from sending emails. Please contact the clinic via telephone on (03) 5243 6555.

However, in certain circumstances, we may agree to email you with a response to a query and/or with information or documentation that you have requested which does include your health information, provided that you have confirmed that you have considered and accepted the risks associated with email communications. Before we do so, we will need to verify your identity and your email address.



### **Providing information to other treating health practitioners**

The health practitioners in this practice respect your right to decide how your personal health information is used or disclosed (for example to other treating practitioners). In all but exceptional circumstances, personal information that identifies you will be sent to other people only with your consent. Gaining your consent is the guiding principle.

In this practice, it is customary for all treating health practitioners to have access to all the medical records. If you have any concerns about other doctors at this practice being able to see your records discuss your concerns with your doctor.

It is important that other people involved in your care, such as other doctors or health professionals, are informed of relevant parts of your medical history so they can best care for you. Your doctor will let you know before this occurs. If you have any concerns about this discuss them with your doctor

### **Providing your information to others**

Your treating health practitioner will not disclose your personal health information to a third party unless:

- You have consented to the disclosure
- This disclosure is necessary because you are at risk of harm without treatment and you are unable to give consent- for example you might be unconscious after an accident; or
- Your doctor is legally obliged to disclose the information (e.g. Notification of certain infectious diseases or suspected child abuse, or a subpoena or court order); or
- The information is necessary to obtain Medicare payments or other health insurance rebates or
- There is an overriding public health and safety interest in the release of the information.

There are times when disclosure is necessary for the doctors in the practice to carry out a review of their practice for the purpose of improving the quality of care provided and the activity has been approved under Commonwealth or State legislation. This provides safeguards to protect the confidentiality of the information provided.

In any of the above cases only information which is necessary to achieve the objectives will be provided.

### **Using health information for quality improvement and research**

We use patient health information to assist in improving the quality of care we give to all our patients by reviewing the treatments used in the practice.

We may also use information that does not identify you in research projects to improve health care in the community. You will normally be informed if your information is to be used for this purpose and will have the opportunity to refuse to have your unidentified information used in this way.

Wherever practicable, the information used for research will not be in a form that would enable you to be identified. The publication of research results which use your information will never be in a form that enables you to be identified.



We may also collect your personal information when you, send us an email or reply SMS, telephone us, make an online appointment or communicate with us using social media.

In some circumstances, where the research serves as important public interest, identifiable medical records can be used for medical research without your consent under guidelines issued by the National, Health and Medical Research Council. This research must be approved by an official ethics committee.

### **Security of information in the practice**

This practice employs computer software to maintain medical records. We will ensure that any of your personal information that is put on computer will be kept private in the same way as occurs with paper records. This will protect your record from unauthorized access. All staff have individual passwords to access your health records and these are auditable. When a staff member leaves this access is disabled.

### **Access to health information**

You have access to the information contained in your medical record. You may ask your doctor about any aspect of your health care including information in your record. We believe that sharing information is important for good communication between you and your doctor and for good health care.

Information in your record can be provided to you by way of an accurate and up to date summary of your care, for instance if you are moving away and are transferring to a new doctor. Do not hesitate to ask your doctor if you want a summary of your care for any reason. If you request a summary or direct access to your full medical record, your doctor will need to consider the risk of any physical or mental harm to you or any other person which may result from disclosure of your health information and may need to remove any information that may impact on the privacy of other individuals.

You will be asked to complete and sign a form called "Request for Medical History". Your doctor will be pleased to provide a full copy of the health summary or medical record. Depending on what is involved, you may be asked to contribute to the cost of providing the information.

### **Resolving concerns regarding the privacy of your health information**

If you have any concerns regarding the privacy of your health information or regarding the accuracy of the information held by the practice, you should discuss these with your doctor. Inaccurate information will be corrected, or your concerns noted in the records. For legal reasons, the original notes will be retained.

### **Results Policy**

Your doctor or receptionist will contact you directly if any of your pathology or radiology results require an urgent follow-up appointment.

If your results &/or a letter from a specialist requires a non-urgent follow-up appointment, you will receive a sequence of x3 SMS messages, followed by a phone call, and then a letter until you book an appointment (NB – That sequence will stop as soon as you book for an appointment). If you cancel that appointment, the above sequence will recommence. If you have opted out of receiving



SMS/HotDoc messages, or do not have a mobile phone number, our reception staff will phone you to ensure you book an appointment.

If your results are normal, you will not receive any messages or phone calls from the doctor or reception.

**Further information on Privacy Legislation is available from:**

**Office of the Federal Privacy Commissioner**

**1300 363 992**

**Office of the Health Services Commissioner (Victoria)**

**1800 136 066**