

COMMUNICATION POLICY

Secure Electronic Communication

Purpose

The Secure Electronic Communication Policy ensures that patient health information communicated electronically by TMC SMC Medical is done securely, maintaining confidentiality and compliance with privacy laws and standards.

Policy

TMC SMC Medical recognizes the importance of securely communicating patient health information to health services, government agencies, other health service providers, and in response to third-party requests. This policy outlines procedures to mitigate risks associated with electronic communication while adhering to Australian Privacy Principles (APPs) and relevant state laws.

Procedure Secure

Secure Messaging Platforms:

- Where available, all patient health information should be communicated via secure messaging platforms such as HealthLink, or HL7.
- Ensure that recipients are registered and have access to these secure platforms before transmitting sensitive information.

Email Communication:

- Use of email for transmitting patient health information should be minimized due to security risks.
- If email transmission is necessary and secure messaging platforms are not an option:
 - Reception verifies the email address with the patient or requesting party over the phone to ensure accuracy.
 - Documents containing patient health information are encrypted and password protected as PDF files.
 - The receiver must contact the practice directly to obtain the password to open the encrypted file.
 - Emphasize to recipients the importance of not forwarding or altering the contents of the encrypted document.

Third-Party Requests:

- Before disclosing patient health information to third parties, verify the identity and authority of the requester.
- Ensure that the communication method (secure messaging or encrypted email) aligns with privacy and security standards.
- Maintain a record of disclosures made to third parties in patient records as per legal requirements.

Compliance and Training:

- Regularly review and update procedures to align with current privacy regulations and technology standards.
- Provide training to staff on the importance of secure electronic communication and the procedures outlined in this policy.
- Conduct periodic audits to assess compliance with policy requirements and identify areas for improvement.

Social Media

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines for the safe, professional, and ethical use of social media by all staff members of our medical practice. This policy aims to protect patient confidentiality, uphold professional standards, and safeguard the practice's reputation.

Policy

Social media refers to online platforms and networks used for interactive communication and sharing of information. This policy applies to both business-related and personal use of social media by practice staff.

- **Safe and Professional Use:** Practice staff must use social media in a manner that is lawful, respectful, and does not compromise patient confidentiality or the practice's reputation. This includes refraining from posting unlawful, offensive, or defamatory content.
- **Practice Social Media Accounts:** Our practice does not currently maintain social media accounts. The practice's online presence is limited to its official website.
- **Personal Social Media Use:** Staff are permitted to engage in personal social media activities outside of work hours. However, they must ensure that their actions do not reflect negatively on the practice or disclose confidential information about patients, staff, or business operations.

Procedure

- **Extent of Use:** The practice does not actively utilize social media for communication or marketing purposes. If there is a need to engage in social media activities in the future, a designated social media Officer will be appointed to oversee content creation and adherence to this policy.
- **Guidelines for Personal Use:** Staff must not represent personal opinions as those of the practice. They should avoid posting content that could potentially bring the practice into disrepute or violate patient confidentiality.
- **Protection of Confidential Information:** Staff must not disclose confidential or proprietary information related to the practice on personal or public social media platforms. This includes patient information, staff details, and any non-public business information.

- **Compliance with Laws:** All social media activities must comply with applicable laws, including copyright, privacy, and fair use regulations. Staff are responsible for ensuring that their

posts do not violate these laws.

Email

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines for the appropriate use of email and electronic communication within our medical practice. It aims to ensure effective communication while safeguarding patient privacy and maintaining professional standards.

Policy

Our practice utilises email and electronic communication as a convenient and efficient means of communication with patients, healthcare providers, and other stakeholders. Key considerations include:

- **Guidance for Use:** Email and electronic communication are used to facilitate non-urgent communications, appointment reminders, and administrative tasks within the practice.
- **Forms of Electronic Communication:** Our practice primarily uses email for communication, alongside secure messaging platforms such as HealthLink, and HL7 for sensitive or clinical information.
- **Communicating with Patients:** Patients may contact the practice via email for non-urgent inquiries or administrative matters. However, email is not suitable for urgent medical issues or emergencies.
- **Communicating About Patients:** Confidential patient information should only be communicated via secure methods to ensure privacy and compliance with privacy laws.

Procedure

- **Extent of Use:** Email and electronic communication are integrated into our practice for non-urgent communication purposes. Clinical decisions and urgent matters should not be communicated via email.
- **Principles Applied:** Our practice adheres to principles of patient confidentiality and privacy. Patient access to a member of the clinical team is facilitated via phone or secure messaging platforms for sensitive information.
- **Response Time:** Patients can expect a response to non-urgent emails within [specify timeframe, e.g., 2 business days]. Patients are informed of this timeframe through automated replies and practice communications.
- **Privacy Risks:** Patients are informed of the potential risks to privacy when using email or unsecured electronic communication. This information is provided through our practice website, new patient forms, and automated email responses.
- **Data Protection:** To protect patient information, emails containing sensitive data are encrypted with passwords before transmission. Receivers are required to contact the practice for the password to access the encrypted file.

Communicating by Telephone

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure effective communication practices via telephone at TMC/SMC Medical, maintaining patient confidentiality, efficient triaging, and timely response to patient needs.

Policy

TMC/SMC Medical utilizes a structured telecommunication system to facilitate effective patient communication, including provisions for auditory privacy, confidentiality, and appropriate handling of telephone enquiries.

Procedure

Effective Communication with Patients: Receptionists are trained to promptly answer incoming calls, identify patients by confirming at least three identifiers (e.g., family name, given names, date of birth), and address patient needs effectively. Urgent enquiries are triaged using the POPGUNS protocol to ensure timely medical attention.

Emergency Procedures: Patients requiring emergency assistance are immediately advised to dial 000 for ambulance services. For urgent medical enquiries that do not require emergency services, calls are transferred to available medical staff for prompt assessment and advice.

Clinical Team Engagement: Messages left for clinical team members are documented in Best Practice. Receptionists record detailed information in contact notes, ensuring the clinical team is informed of patient messages promptly. In cases where a team member is absent, arrangements are made to ensure messages are reviewed and responded to in a timely manner.

Telephone Consultations: Doctors and nurses conduct comprehensive consultations over the phone, discussing medical information, diagnoses, treatment options, and sensitive health matters. Receptionists are instructed not to discuss health related matters or breach patient confidentiality unless verifying information related to appointments, results, or administrative queries.

Special Needs Patients: Patients with special communication needs are supported through accessible communication methods, including interpreters or alternative communication aids, to ensure clear understanding and effective engagement over the phone.

Communicating With Patients

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure effective communication with all patients at TMC/SMC Medical, including those with special communication needs, to uphold their right to understand health information and participate in decision making.

TMC/SMC Medical is committed to communicating effectively with all patients, recognizing their diverse communication needs, including those with low English proficiency, communication impairments, disabilities, or cognitive impairments. This includes ensuring access to interpreters and communication services where necessary.

Interpreter Services & Communication Services

SERVICE	PHONE	WEBSITE	PURPOSE
TIS	131450	www.tis.gov.au	Translation
National Relay Service		www.relayservice.com.au	

Procedure

Identification of Special Communication Needs:

The practice identifies patients with special communication needs through initial patient intake forms, observations during interactions, or patient self-disclosure.

Patient Consent and Communication Assistance: When special communication needs are identified, receptionists seek patient consent to utilize appropriate communication aids or interpreter services. Consent is documented in patient records.

Support for Patients with Disabilities: Patients requiring assistance due to hearing, speech, vision impairments, or cognitive disabilities are supported through appropriate communication aids. This may involve using the National Relay Service for patients who are deaf or accessing on-site interpreting services for those requiring face-to-face communication assistance.

Use of Interpreter Services: The practice utilizes the Telephone Interpreter Service (131 450) for over-the-phone and on-site interpreting needs. For on-site services, 48 hours' notice is required. Doctors are registered with the service and utilize their individual registration IDs for accessing interpreter services.

Booking Interpreter Services: Receptionists responsible for booking interpreter services ensure that appointments requiring interpreters are scheduled appropriately. They communicate the need for interpreter services clearly to patients and confirm interpreter availability prior to appointments.

Cultural and Linguistic Resources: The practice maintains culturally appropriate resources, such as translated materials and plain English information, available to patients and staff. These resources aid in effective communication and patient understanding of healthcare information.