

PURPOSE

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.

POLICY

Our practice's primary reason for communicating electronically to patients is to issue SMS appointment and clinical 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 not initiate electronic communication (other than SMS appointment and clinical 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. An automatic response is sent to patients on receipt of all incoming emails that states:

Thank you for contacting Ashburton Family Practice.

If you have a medical emergency, please call 000 or for other urgent matters call the practice directly on 03 9885 1200 otherwise we will endeavour to get back to you within 48-72 hours. Please note, emails are not monitored for booking appointments.

It is our practice policy to only proceed with email requests that include 3 points of identification. This includes the patient's full name, date of birth and current address. If you are a patient who is seeking more information or requesting for documents to be released, you must provide us with these identification measures as well as providing specific details for each request. If you have not done this, please do so now.

Please note, Email correspondence is not considered a secure source of transmitting health information as it could be intercepted, forwarded or read by someone other than the intended recipient. We will therefore not initiate electronic communications with our patients however upon receipt of incoming electronic correspondence, this will imply the sender has consented to be contacted via email.

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 on the new patient registration form, our website and via signage in the waiting room 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.

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 where possible.

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.

The practice uses an email disclaimer notice on outgoing emails that are affiliated with the practice stating:

This email, including any attachments, may contain confidential information, which also may be legally privileged. Only the intended recipient may access, use, distribute or copy this email. If this email is received in error, please inform the sender by return email and delete the original. If there are doubts about the validity of this message, please contact the sender by telephone. It is the recipient's responsibility to check the email and any attached files for viruses.