



Carolinah HealthCare System

GUIDELINES FOR E-MAIL WITH PATIENTS

Risks of Using E-Mail

You have requested that we, Carolinas Healthcare Systems (CHS), communicate with you by e-mail. While we will use reasonable means to protect the security and confidentiality of e-mails sent and received, we cannot guarantee the security and confidentiality of all e-mail communication. Transmitting patient information by e-mail has a number of risks that you should consider. These risks include, but are not limited to, the following:

- E-mail can be circulated, forwarded and stored in numerous paper and electronic files.
- E-mail can be immediately broadcast worldwide and received by many intended and unintended recipients.
- E-mail senders can easily misaddress an e-mail.
- E-mail is easier to falsify than handwritten or signed documents.
- Backup copies of e-mail may exist even after the sender or the recipient has deleted his or her copy.
- Many employers and on-line services have a right to archive and inspect e-mails transmitted through their systems.
- E-mail can be intercepted, altered, forwarded or used without authorization or detection.
- E-mail can be used to introduce viruses into computer systems.
- E-mail can be used as evidence in court.
- E-mail can be lost in transmission.
- E-mails can be posted on the internet or other publicly available networks.

Your Agreement

Because of the security and confidentiality risks with e-mail, you must agree to following before we can e-mail your information to you:

- **PLEASE DO NOT USE E-MAIL FOR MEDICAL EMERGENCIES OR OTHER TIME-SENSITIVE MATTERS – CONTACT YOUR PROVIDER IN PERSON OR BY PHONE, OR CALL 911 IN AN EMERGENCY.**
- You must complete the CHS Authorization for Release of Health Information Form (Authorization) and submit it to a CHS representative located at the practice/facility for the individual/practice/facility which you are authorizing to communicate with you by e-mail. CHS will be authorized to release the information listed on the Authorization. The Authorization and these Guidelines are located on the internet at <http://www.carolinahhealthcare.org/body.cfm?id=19>.
- If others are involved in your healthcare, such as guardians or health care agents, your authorization for e-mail communications extends to them, unless you tell us otherwise.
- You understand that if you have checked “All Records and Details” on the Authorization, CHS may have restrictions for communication regarding sensitive information, such as information regarding sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, mental health, developmental disability or substance abuse.
- You understand and agree that CHS cannot guarantee the security and confidentiality of e-mail communications and will not be liable for any improper disclosure of confidential information, including your patient information, that is not caused by our intentional misconduct.

- You understand and agree that all e-mails between you and CHS may be printed and placed in your medical record and any person authorized to access that medical file will have access to such e-mails. You also understand and agree that CHS may forward your e-mails to staff and agents and health care providers as necessary for diagnosis, treatment, reimbursement and other treatment, payment or operational purposes. We will not, however, forward e-mails to independent third parties without your prior written consent, except as authorized or required by law.
- E-mail is provided as a convenience, not as a substitute for personal treatment or other medical care. Although we will endeavor to read and respond promptly to an e-mail from you, we cannot guarantee that e-mails will be read and responded to within any particular period of time. If your e-mail requires or invites a response from us and you have not received a response within a reasonable time period (please allow for at least 72 hours), it is your responsibility to follow up to determine whether the intended recipient received the e-mail and when the recipient will respond. Similarly, it is your responsibility to follow up and/or schedule an appointment, if warranted.
- You may withdraw your Authorization only by written communication to each individual/practice/facility for which an Authorization has been submitted and approved by CHS.
- You are responsible for protecting your password or other means of access to e-mail. You are also responsible for knowing who can access your e-mail account, such as a spouse or a friend, and should choose your e-mail account accordingly. You agree that we are not liable for breaches of confidentiality caused by you or any third party.
- You agree to waive and release any and all claims, liability, damages, costs and fees relating to the e-mailing of your information, including unauthorized access or other issues that may arise, from and against The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Hospital Authority d/b/a Carolinas HealthCare System, its hospitals, practices, affiliates, subsidiaries, directors, officers, employees, agents, and representatives. In addition, you agree to be bound to these Guidelines, as well as any other requirements or guidelines we may publish relating to e-mail communications.
- You agree to limit or avoid use of your employer's computer or other computers that are not under your control, such as those provided at internet cafés or libraries.
- You agree to promptly inform each individual/practice/facility in writing of changes in your e-mail address. We are not responsible for e-mails to a prior address if each individual/practice/facility for which CHS has approved Authorization has not been advised of the change in writing.
- You agree to put your name in the body of the e-mail so we know who is sending it.
- You agree to include the category of the communication in the e-mail's subject line for routing purposes (such as "billing question", "prescription information", "medical advice").
- You agree to review the e-mail to make sure it is clear and that all relevant information is provided before sending it.
- You agree to make sure that our e-mail address is correct before sending the e-mail.
- You agree to send us a reply message or delivery receipt when we send you an e-mail so we know you have received it.
- You agree to take precautions to preserve the confidentiality of e-mails, such as using screen savers and safeguarding your computer password.
- You agree to abide by all of the above during your email communications with us.

Recommendations

- In order to help protect your computer against malicious software and safeguard your information, software and system communications we recommend you install and regularly update protective software, such as firewall, anti-virus and anti-spyware programs.
- In order to help reduce the threat of people inappropriately intercepting and reading your e-mails, we recommend you use software to encrypt your e-mails that contain information you determine to be confidential.