**THOMAS STREET FAMILY MEDICAL CLINIC**

**EMAIL POLICY**

**Communicating by Email within the practice team**

**Policy**

Staff are encouraged to use email as a very important form of communication, however, should be aware that electronic messages should be classified and treated as records. *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*. All messages are sent through internal email and therefore are confidential. Doctor or staff require password to access their email.

Staff have full accountability for emails sent in their name or held in their mailbox, and are expected to utilise this communication tool only for work related correspondence with other members of the team only.

This includes (but is not limited to):

1. limiting the exchange of personal emails
2. refraining from responding to unsolicited or unwanted emails
3. deleting hoaxes or chain emails – set as junk mail
4. email attachments from unknown senders should not be opened
5. virus checking all email attachments
6. maintaining appropriate language within e-communications
7. ensuring any personal opinions are clearly indicated as such
8. confidential information should not be sent unencrypted

Communicating with Patients by Electronic Means

Policy

Our practice is mindful that even if patients have provided electronic contact details, they may not be proficient in being communicated to electronically and therefore consent is needed prior to engaging in electronic communication with the patient. Electronic communications includes primarily short message service (SMS), faxes, scripts sent to patients by email (encrypted) and referrals. Other information that the patient may request is sent by send safely an encrypted service.

Communication with patients via electronic means is conducted with appropriate regard to privacy.

Procedure

Our practice’s primary reason for communicating electronically to patients is to issue appointment reminders, electronic scripts (encrypted), follow up reminders by SMS and referrals letters and other patient documents by send safely (encrypted) we verify the correct contact details of the patient at the time of the appointment being made and during the consultation before documents are emailed. All documents emailed to patients are encrypted and patients are unable to reply to the email. Patients are fully informed of the risks associated with email communication in that the information could be intercepted or read by someone else.

Our practice does not accept emails from patients to obtain advice or information about their care. Our practice will only provide information that is of general, non urgent nature by SMS such as appointment reminders and follow up appointments and will not initiate electronic (email) communication with a patient other than sending scripts or one way communication with documents and referrals that are always sent by encrypted email (Send Safely).

Any electronic communications received from patients or other health professionals via email receive an auto reply that states:

***Auto Reply***

*Thomas Street Family Medical Clinic does NOT accept emails that are NOT encrypted.*

*Please call the clinic for further information on 9578 2561.*

All members of the practice team are made aware of our policy regarding electronic communications with patients during induction and are reminded of this policy on an ongoing basis. They are made aware that electronic communications can be forwarded, intercepted, printed and stored by others. Therefore emailing patients as a form of communication holds many risks. Each staff member has full accountability for emails sent in their name.

The Practice reserves the right to check individual email as a precaution to fraud, workplace harassment or breaches of confidence by employees. Inappropriate use of the Email facility will be fully investigated and may be grounds for dismissal.

Each staff member is required to read and sign the Internet and Email Policy form on commencement. This is located after 5.17.