



E V A N D A L E
G E N E R A L
P R A C T I C E

CONFIDENTIALITY

It is a requirement of our employees that they sign a Confidentiality Agreement.

The legal requirement of confidentiality extends from the Practice Principal to all employees.

Breaches of confidentiality may be verbal, visual or auditory.

This practice considers that the following incidents constitute a breach of confidentiality:

- Discussion of patient condition with the patient by other than qualified medical practitioner who are directly involved in the care of the patient.
- Discussion of patient condition with family, friends or others.
- Discussion of patient condition with other employees where the discussion is not directly applicable to patient care or employee's education.
- Leaving patient electronic files open in full view of inappropriate parties.
- Discussing matters pertaining to a patient in a loud or unprofessional manner, in hearing range of others.
- The practice's Privacy Policy is contained in this document and covers your responsibilities with respect to the National Privacy Act. Release of patient's records, other than to the referring doctor, requires the patient's written consent. Under no circumstances is information to be given to the media regarding the possible treatment or non-treatment of patients. In all cases the universal answer is to be: If the caller insists, direct them to the Practice Manager, if this is not possible, politely hang-up. In addition to the need for verbal, visual and auditory confidentiality, care must be taken with disposal of documents. All paperwork must be shredded or torn up before disposal.

MANAGEMENT OF HEALTH INFORMATION

This policy primarily addresses the management of “personal health information” in this practice.

PRIVACY

Personal health information is defined as information concerning a patient’s health, medical history, or past or present medical care; and which is in a form that enables or could enable the patient to be identified. It includes information about an individual’s express wishes concerning current and future health services.

All GP’s and practice staff will ensure that patients can discuss issues relating to their health, and that the GP can record relevant personal health information, in a setting that provides visual privacy and protects against any conversation being overheard by a third party.

Staff will not enter a consultation room during a consultation without knocking or otherwise communicating with the GP.

Staff, Registrars and Students will not be present during the consultation without the prior permission of the patient.

ACCESS TO MEDICAL RECORDS:

The Health Records Act gives consumers a right to ACCESS their personal health record, not a right to physically take them away. The explanatory notes to the Act set out in plainer language the type of access that is available under the Act:

‘Section 28 of the Act specifies the ways in which a right of access may be exercised under this Act. Where the information is collected after commencement of the Act (that is, AFTER 1 July 2002), the right may be exercised by:

- Inspection of the information;
- Obtaining a copy (or, with the agreement of the organisation concerned, an accurate summary); and
- Viewing the information and receiving an explanation if the organisation is a health service provider (or in any other case, with the agreement of the organisation).
- Where the information is collected before commencement of the Act (that is BEFORE 1 July 2002), the individual is entitled to receive an accurate summary of that information. The other forms of access outlined above are only available with the agreement of the individual and the organisation’

Personal Information

- You can only collect personal information that is necessary and relevant for a legitimate function or activity
- When you collect information from and about individuals, we need to be open with them about why it is being collected and to whom it might be disclosed
- The information should be handled in accordance with the persons expectations
- If, later on, it is to be handled for other purposes that are not in accordance with their expectations, you need to seek their consent to use or disclose it for these other purposes; otherwise, you can seek to rely upon the authority of law or upon one of the public interest exceptions in the Health privacy Principles.
- E.g. medical information being disclosed to a specialist consultant prior to their consultation with the specialist would be within most people's normal expectations

PATIENT RIGHTS

The practices' staff members recognise rights and needs of all patients.

No patient is refused access to clinical assessment or medical treatment on the basis of gender, race, disability, Aboriginality, age, religion, ethnicity beliefs, sexual preference or medical condition. Provisions are implemented to ensure patients with a disability can access our services.

The practice identifies important/significant cultural groups within our practice including non-English speaking background patients, religious groups and those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background. We endeavour to continue to develop any strategies required to meet their needs.

The practice provides respectful care at all times and is mindful of patient's personal dignity. We have a plan in place to respectfully manage patients in distress. (Medical Emergencies and Urgent Matters)

- Visual and auditory privacy is provided in the waiting room and during the consultation. The waiting room provides a tonic TV to assist patient auditory and visual privacy.
- Each doctors, nurses and treatment consulting room has a curtain around the examination bed for patient privacy and the door is closed for each consultation.

Patient privacy and confidentiality is assured for consultations and in medical and account records, appointments, telephone calls and electronic media including computer information.

- Doctors and staff do not leave patient information in any format in areas of the Practice or surrounds for unauthorised access by the public.
- Staff members sign a privacy agreement upon acceptance of employment and risk immediate dismissal should a breach of this agreement occur.
- Information no longer required that contains any reference to patients, including diagnosis reports, specialist's letters, accounts etc. is securely disposed of via shredding.

Patients have a right to access their personal health information and may request to view their record or obtain a copy.

Our privacy policy for the management of health information is displayed in the waiting room and also on the practice information sheet. It is made available to anyone who asks. This policy includes information about the type of information this practice collects, uses, how it protects it and to whom we disclose it to.

Patients have the right to refuse any treatment, advice or procedure. Our doctors discuss all aspects of treatment and will offer alternatives should a patient seek another medical opinion. (Refer to Management of a patient refusing treatment or advice)

For ongoing management of patients should they leave the area, our doctors will ask for the forwarding doctor's or Practice address. A copy of the patient's medical record or the health summary will be sent directly to the new location via post or an electronic copy can be sent if the new surgery uses compatible software.

The Practice acknowledges a patient's right to complain. We provide mechanisms to ensure that this feedback in addition to positive comments and suggestions are freely received and any changes implemented where possible.

Patients are provided with sufficient information about the purpose, importance, benefits, risks and possible costs associated with proposed investigations, referrals or treatments to enable patients to make informed decisions about their health.

Patients are provided with adequate information about our practice to facilitate access to care including arrangement for care outside normal opening hours. (See patient information brochure).

This Practice participates in the RACGP Training Program and regularly has registrars on site. Patients are advised of this with a poster in the waiting room. If medical students are on practice placement here and observe doctors' consultations, then the patient is asked for his/her consent.

Consent is requested when nursing students are on practical placement with our registered nurses also.

The patient's consent is sought for participation in health reminders systems and research programs. Consent can be withdrawn at any time by the patient.

Our Commitment to Service

1. You will be treated as an individual, with courtesy, respect and dignity at all times.
2. You will be given the names of the people involved in your care.
3. You will be given, under normal circumstances, a routine appointment with a doctor of your choice at the next available time he/she is available.
4. Every reasonable attempt will be made to ensure you are seen within 30 minutes of your appointment time. Should you be kept waiting longer than this you should be advised of the estimated delay and given an explanation for this.
5. You will be given the most appropriate care by suitably qualified people, no care or treatment will be given without your formal consent.
6. You will be referred to a consultant acceptable to you when your doctor feels that such a course of action is necessary.
7. We need you to make sure that you tell us all the information we need to help in your care.
8. We need you to make sure you are reviewed if your symptoms change or your condition deteriorates.
8. We need you to let us know if you do not understand any of our advice.
9. You have a right of access to your medical records subject to any limitations in the law.
10. You will have access to a doctor at all times for genuine emergencies.

With these rights come responsibilities and for the patients this means:

1. If you are unable to keep your appointment, please let us know as soon as possible so we can offer it to another patient. It is surgery policy to write to all patients who fail to attend their appointment.
2. Please try to arrive on time for your appointment. If you are late, we cannot guarantee to see you within our agreed waiting limits.
3. Please treat the doctors and staff with the respect and courtesy you would expect to receive yourself. We are here to help you but may need information from you to enable us to offer you the most appropriate care. Although reception staff are not medically trained, they may ask you for medical information. This will be at the request of the doctor and solely for them to be able to pass this on to the doctor for assessment. Reception staff are not involved in making clinical decisions of any kind.
4. Where possible please telephone the surgery to make an appointment. If you arrive at the surgery without one, we will try to assist you but cannot always guarantee that you will be seen which may cause inconvenience to you.
5. All appointments are made to cover **one** consultation. Please make a separate appointment for each person who wishes to see the doctor.
6. Please notify the surgery if you change your address.
7. We ask patients to give 48 hours' notice for repeat prescriptions, this gives us the time required to allow for accurate prescribing.
8. The doctor is here to give you treatment and advice. It is important that you understand the information given to you. If you are unsure about your treatment please ask for more information.
9. Although the doctor will try to see you within a reasonable time when you attend the surgery, please be patient if an emergency situation arises and you are delayed.

PRIVACY

This practice is bound by the *Commonwealth Privacy Act – Privacy Amendment (Private Sector) Act 2000*.

‘Personal health information’ means health information which either specifically identifies the individual or from which their identity can reasonably be ascertained.

Doctors, allied health practitioners and all other staff and contractors associated with this Practice have a responsibility to maintain the privacy of personal health information and related financial information. The privacy of this information is every patient’s right.

The maintenance of privacy requires that any information regarding individual patients, including staff members who may be patients, may not be disclosed either verbally, in writing, in electronic form, by copying either at the Practice or outside it, during or outside work hours, except for strictly authorised use within the patient care context at the Practice or as legally directed.

There are no degrees of privacy. All patient information must be considered private and confidential, even that which is seen or heard and therefore is not to be disclosed to family, friends, staff or others without the patient’s approval. Any information given to unauthorised personnel will result in disciplinary action and possible dismissal.

All employees and students of this practice are issued with the privacy policy and sign a privacy statement as part of their terms and conditions of employment or placement.

The policies and procedure of the practice are further explained during the induction of new staff members, and the induction form is signed by the new employee as confirmation that they understand and accept their obligations in relation to patient privacy and confidentiality of medical information.

All information received in the course of a consultation between a doctor and the patient is considered personal health information. This information includes medical details, family information, address, employment and other demographic and accounts data obtained via reception. Medical information can include past medical and social history, current health issues and future medical care. It includes the formal medical record whether written or electronic and information held or recorded on any other medium e.g. letter, fax, or electronically.

The physical medical records (paper or electronic) and related information created and maintained for the continuing management of each patient are the property of this Practice. The Practice ensures the protection of all information contained therein. This information is deemed a personal health record and while the patient does not have ownership of the record, he/she has the right to access under the provisions of the *Commonwealth Privacy Act*. Requests for access to the medical record will be acted upon only if received in written format, and the treating General Practitioner authorises this access.

COMPLAINTS

Our practice deals with complaints in a courteous and understanding manner. Perceptions of what is reasonable and fair can change when patients are unwell or anxious.

Patient satisfaction affects health outcomes and our practice acknowledges that patient complaints are an important source of customer feedback. Our practice provides patients with the opportunity to provide compliments, complaints or suggestions.

Procedure

Every complaint should be acknowledged, investigated and remedied. The acknowledgment should usually be given within two working days. The time scale for the investigation and remediation will vary according to the complaint.

In investigation of the complaint the following are addressed:

- What is the complaint about
- What system, individual or procedure caused the complaint to arise
- How can we learn from the complaint?
- What may be done to rectify the situation
- Should further assistance be required e.g. Referred to the Practice Principal
- How and when will feedback be given to the complainant
- A Complaint specifically made at an individual doctor and staff member needs to be notified along with practice Principals as the time of event

If an investigation finds that a staff member is at fault the incident is to be immediately discussed with the staff member and action taken as to whether further discipline is required.

Complaints (de-identified if necessary) may need to be discussed at staff meetings so that everyone may discuss and learn from the outcomes. Focus should be placed on the complaint, how it was resolved and how it might have been better handled.

These are stored confidentially in a file by the Practice Manager.

If no resolution can be made through the above process, patients should contact the Health Complaints Commissioner by telephoning 1800 001 170.