



Illawarra Medical Centre

Electronic Communication Policy

Date of Policy

2 August 2024

Name of Practice

Illawarra Medical Centre ("practice")

Name of Electronic Communication Officer

Dr Alan Leeb

Purpose

General practices are increasingly using electronic communication to correspond with patients and other health professionals.

Our practice *Electronic Communication Policy* covers the use of email, SMS, internet and social media and supports the practice's *Social Media Policy*. The *Electronic Communication Policy* helps to protect the security of patient information and the reputation of Illawarra Medical Centre.

The practice team, contractors and other staff will be familiar with the following policy, comply with the policy, and understand the risks associated with using electronic forms of communication, both internally and externally.

The Electronic Communication Officer

The practice has appointed Dr Alan Leeb to act as Electronic Communications Officer.

The Electronic Communications Officer is responsible for:

- Maintaining this policy.
- Providing an information session on this policy as part of a new employee's induction.
- Informing staff of updates and refresher training through staff meetings and notices.
- Responding to any concerns that staff or patients have with the policy.

Email and SMS – For Staff

The use of email and short message services (SMS) are recognised as useful tools for communication purposes. Practice staff are permitted to use the practice email accounts to send and receive business related material such as education updates, stakeholder communication, submitting Medicare provider number applications and communicating with locums or other staff where appropriate.

The practice utilises a spam filtering program and staff are advised to exercise caution in using email and SMS communication. Each of our team members will have unique identification for all protected systems.

Staff will not share passwords and access will be by individual passwords only. Staff are encouraged to periodically change their passwords every 90 days.

The use of the practice email account is for business communications only.

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

Patient information will only be sent via email where the patient has consented to this mode of direct communication. Employees are reminded that the practice may become liable for the contents of any email messages under certain circumstances.

The use of personal email accounts using practice internet and computer systems is discouraged. Large files, such as video files and photographs, should not be transmitted over the practice internet computer systems for personal communication.

Internet

The internet can be accessed by all members of staff; however, excessive use of the internet is not acceptable.

Staff members and contractors are encouraged to use the internet for research activities pertaining to their role and should be aware that usage statistics are recorded and submitted to management as required.

Staff members and contractors have full accountability for internet sites accessed on their workstations and are expected to utilise this tool in an acceptable manner. This includes (but is not limited to):

- Limiting personal use of the internet.
- Accessing ONLY reputable sites and subject matter.
- Verifying any information taken off the internet for business purposes prior to use.
- Not downloading any unnecessary or suspect information.
- Being aware of any potential security risks (i.e. access/viruses).
- Not disclosing any confidential information via the internet without prior permission from the Practice Manager or Electronic Communication Officer (i.e. credit card number).
- Maintaining the practice's confidentiality and business ethics in any dealings across the internet.
- Observing copyright restrictions relating to material accessed/downloaded.

All sites accessed must comply with legal and ethical standards and the practice policies. The internet must never be used to download or access any illegal software or pornographic, defamatory, offensive, share-trading or gambling-related material.

Web browser security settings are not to be changed without authorisation of the practice manager.

The practice reserves the right to check an individuals' internet history as precaution to fraud, viruses, workplace harassment or breaches of confidence by employees. Inappropriate use of the internet will be fully investigated and may be grounds for dismissal.

Social Media

Social media is defined as websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking. These include Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube.

In regards to the use of social media, the practice team, contractors and other staff members are expected to be familiar with and adhere to the standards set out in the practice *Social Media Policy*.

Email and SMS – For Patients

Our patients will be given the option of being contacted by electronic means, such as via email and/or SMS.

All new and existing patients in the practice will be given an information sheet on our *Electronic Communication Policy* and asked to provide signed consent to agree or disagree to be communicated with in this manner.

It is acknowledged by the practice that consent is implied if the patient initiates electronic communications with the practice.

Reception staff are to check each patient has this information on their record on arrival to the practice, along with the verification of their name, date of birth and address.

The signed consent will be scanned and recorded in the patient electronic record and their response recorded on the practice software.

Privacy

In complying with the *Privacy Amendment (Private Sector) Act 2000*, our practice provides advice to patients on the collection, use and disclosure of personal information through our *Privacy Policy*, available on our website.

The practice website is continually monitored to ensure it is kept current and up-to-date and that any changes to the *Privacy Policy* or the practice itself are reflected on the website.