

PERSONAL INFORMATION, PRIVACY AND YOUR DOCTOR

Aims

This leaflet aims to explain clearly how personal information about you and your health is recorded and managed in this Practice. Your doctors will be happy to discuss this with you.

Your Personal Health Information

Your doctor needs information about your past and present health in order to provide you with high quality care. This Practice will make sure that you are able to discuss your health with your doctor in private.

Information is called “Personal Health Information” if it concerns your health, medical history or past or future medical care and if someone reading it would be able to identify you.

This Practice follows the “code of practice for management for health information in medical practices” developed by the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners. This means that your personal health information is kept private and secure. The approach used in code is consistent with the provisions of Federal and State Privacy Legislation. The Practice has a written policy on personal health information. This policy is available to all patients for inspection.

Your Medical Records

Your doctor will do his or her best to make sure that your medical records:

- Are accurate, comprehensive, well organised and legible
- Are up to date
- Have enough information to allow another doctor to care for you
- Do not contain offensive or irrelevant comments about you
- Contain a summary of your care
- Can be used to remind you, with your permission, to return for follow up, check-ups and reviews

Your doctor will only collect information that is relevant to your medical care. If you are uncertain as to why information is being requested, then ask your doctor.

Providing Your Information to Other Doctors

The doctors in this Practice respect your right to decide how your personal health information is used or disclosed (for example, to other doctors). In all but exceptional circumstances, personal information that identifies you will be sent to other people only with your consent. Gaining your consent is the guiding principle.

It is important that other people involved in your care, such as other doctors, are informed of relevant parts of your medical history so that they can best care for you. After discussing with you, your doctor will write a letter to the other doctor, which will either be posted or given to you to be taken. If you have any concerns about this, discuss it with your doctor.

In most group Practices like ours, it is customary for all doctors in the Practice to have access to all the medical records. If you have any concerns about other doctors at this Practice being able to see your records, discuss your concerns with your doctor.

Providing Your Information to Others

Your doctor will not disclose your personal health information to a third party unless:

- You have consented to the disclosure, or
- This disclosure is necessary as you are at risk of harm without treatment and you are unable to give consent, for example, if you are unconscious after an accident, or
- Your doctor is legally obliged to disclose the information, for example, notification of certain infectious diseases or suspected child abuse or a subpoena or court order, or
- The information is necessary to obtain Medicare payments or other health insurance rebates, or
- This disclosure is necessary for the doctors in the Practice to carry out a review of their Practice for the purpose of improving the quality of care provided and the activity has been approved under Commonwealth or State Legislation or by a medical college. This provides safeguards to protect the confidentiality of the information provided, or
- There is an over-riding public interest in the release of the information.

In any of the above cases, only information that is necessary to achieve the objective/s will be provided.

Using Health Information for Quality Improvement and Research

We use patient health information to assist in improving the quality of care we give to our patients by reviewing the treatments used in the Practice.

We may also use the information that does not identify you in research projects to improve health care in the community. You will normally be informed if your information is to be used for this purpose and will have the opportunity to refuse to have your unidentified information used in this way. In some circumstances, where the research serves an important public interest, identifiable medical records can be used for medical research with our consent under guidelines issues by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NH and MRC). This research must be approved by an official ethics committee.

Security of Information in the Practice

We will ensure that any of your personal information that is put on computer will be kept private in the same way as occurs with paper records. This will protect your records from unauthorised access.

Your Access to Your Health Information

You have access to the information contained in your medical record. You may ask your doctor about any aspect of your health care including information in your record. We believe that sharing information is important for good communication between you and your doctor and good health care.

Information in your record can be provided to you by way of an accurate and up to date summary of your care, for instance if you are moving away and are transferring to a new doctor. Do not hesitate to ask your doctor if you want a summary of your care for any reason. If you request a summary of direct access to your full medical record, your doctor will need to take out any information provided by others on a confidential basis. Your doctor will also need to consider the risk of any physical or mental harm to you and any other person which may result from disclosure of your health information.

Your doctor will be pleased to provide a full explanation of the health summary for the medical record provided. Depending on what is involved, you may be asked to contribute to the cost of providing the information.

Resolving Your Concerns Regarding the Privacy of Your Health Information

If you have any concerns regarding the privacy of your health information or regarding the accuracy of the information held by the Practice, you should discuss these with your doctor. Inaccurate information will be corrected or your concerns noted in the records if it is not possible or desirable to alter the original record.

Further Information on Privacy Legislation is Available From:

Office of the Federal Privacy Commissioner – 1300 363 992

Office of the Health Services Commissioner (Victoria) – 1800 136 066

Community and Health Services Complaints Office (ACT) – (02) 6205 2222