

## Practice Communication Policy

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## **Policy**

Our practice endeavours to provide patients with access to timely advice or information about their clinical care. We aim to communicate effectively and use simple, straight forward language and cross-check that patients have understood what has been said.

Our practice adheres to the Australian Privacy Principles (APPs) and the Privacy Act 1988.

Our aim is to facilitate optimal communication opportunities with our patients. We also encourage the use of digital technology to enable our patient with 24-hour access to our appointment system. Our practice allows patients to book an appointment with their preferred healthcare practitioner online via our website or directly with Hot Doc.

The urgency of a patients needs are determined promptly. Electronic communication provides a useful and alternative point of access for our patients. Our patients have the option to contact or be contacted by our practice through electronic means via email and SMS. Our patients are informed of the risks associated with some methods of electronic communications and that their privacy and confidentiality may be compromised. Patients must agree to this when they sign the new patient registration form.

## **Procedure**

This communication can occur through the following channels:

- i) Results – it is the practice policy that results will be given out during a follow up consultation with a doctor only. Under exceptional circumstances (with the treating doctor's approval) the nurse on duty may be able to advise over the telephone, providing that the patient has given the three approved patient identifiers.
- ii) Face to face – this can be via consultation with your doctor, nurse or interactions with other staff members i.e., Practice manager or reception staff.
- iii) Telephone – patients are able to contact the practice via the telephone between the hours of 7:00am – 9:00pm Monday to Friday, 8:00am – 4:00pm Saturday and 8:00am – 2:00pm Sunday on (08) 6117 0480.  
As the first point of contact, receptionist must review the triage support guide to ensure they are correctly addressing patient's needs and concerns. Receptionists will often need to ask questions to determine that the patient receives the most appropriate care, at the most appropriate time. At times you may also be referred to speak to one of our practice nurses to determine the urgency or best course of action for your issue or concern.

Phone calls from patients requesting to speak to the doctor will not generally be put through at the time of the call. This is to minimise disruption to the doctor as they are usually in consultation with another patient and respectfully not wanting to interrupt their consultation. Doctors may take phone calls if time permits and at the doctor's discretion.

Reception staff will ask the patient to briefly explain the reason for the call and will determine if the doctor should be interrupted or if a message can be given to the doctor to return the call at a later time. This may be throughout the day or after the doctor has finished consulting for the day. Where clinically significant information is discussed, a note will be made in the patient's file.

- iv) Fax - faxes received that are patient related are imported directly into the treating practitioner's inbox to review and action, which then allocates into the patient's file. Any urgent patient related faxes are immediately handed to the nurse on duty to flag with the doctor. If the nurse is unavailable or after hours, the results will be handed to the doctor or if that doctor is not available another doctor in the practice will review the fax. All non-patient related faxes are given to the relevant staff member.

All outgoing faxes will be accompanied with a practice cover sheet advising details of who the fax is addressed to, fax number, number of pages and confidentiality and privacy notice.

- v) Email - Email is not a secure form of communication and we do not use this to communicate personal information to patients without their consent. Whilst we make every effort to keep your information secure it is important for patients to be aware of the risks associated with electronic communication, in that the information could potentially be compromised and accessed by someone other than the intended recipient. Patients must be aware that any communication they direct to the surgery via email is also NOT secure and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Patients communicating through email do so at their own risk. This is obtained when patients sign and declare on the new patient registration forms.

If you do choose to contact the surgery via email this will be considered as patient consent to reply via email. We endeavour to reply to all emails within two (2) business days. Our emails are checked on a regular basis by the receptionists ([reception@lagoonmedicalcentre.com.au](mailto:reception@lagoonmedicalcentre.com.au)) and practice manager ([admin@lagoonmedicalcentre.com.au](mailto:admin@lagoonmedicalcentre.com.au)), however they are not constantly monitored. If you have an issue that requires urgent attention, we request that you contact the practice via telephone.

Our practice has a declaration and acknowledgement on each email and reply signature stating the following:

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

Thank you for emailing Lagoon Medical Centre. Please note, emails will be responded to within 2 business days. If you require immediate action regarding the nature of your email please phone our clinic on (08) 6117 0480 during clinic hours, which are 7:00am – 9:00pm Monday to Friday, 8:00am – 4:00pm Saturday and 8:00am – 2:00pm Sunday. If you require urgent medical attention please call 000 or attend your closest emergency department.

#### **CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION**

The information contained in this email (including any attachments) are confidential and intended solely for the use of the named addressee. If you have received this email in error, please immediately advise us by return email ([admin@lagoonmedicalcentre.com.au](mailto:admin@lagoonmedicalcentre.com.au)) and delete the email document. If you are not the intended recipient you are hereby notified that any perusal, use, distribution, copying or disclosure is strictly prohibited.

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- vi) SMS – SMS messages are sent for a variety of health management purposes which may include;
- Appointment reminders are sent the day prior to confirm your appointment
  - Health reminders (i.e., cervical screening reminders, care plans, health assessments)
  - Health recalls (i.e., follow up of test results). We need to ensure that your mobile number is up to date and at each visit to ensure that this information is sent to the correct number. Patients must be aware that if another person can access their mobile phone, then the confidentiality of these communications cannot be protected by the practice.
- vii) Post – from time to time, letters may be sent to eligible patients and for health reminders and recalls for patients who do not have a mobile number or land line, or who have opted out of our electronic messaging systems.

Incoming mail is collected and opened each day. Letters that are received that are patient related are stamped with the received date, and directly imported into the treating practitioner's inbox, which is reviewed and actioned and directly placed into the patient's medical record. All remaining letters are provided to the addressee.

- viii) Website – our practice's website is updated regularly with new information. You can also locate our opening hours, about our practice, information regarding our fees and services, book appointments online, view our doctor's profiles and view our contact information. Our website also includes access to our Email and Privacy Policy and patient information guide (PDF format).
- ix) Facebook – our Facebook page provides general health updates and practice information. This page however, is intended for announcements only by Lagoon Medical Centre and not for the provision of individual medical advice. If you have any queries or questions, we ask that you please contact the practice via telephone.

### **Communicating with patients with special needs**

A contact list of translator and interpreter services and services for patients with a disability is maintained, updated regularly and readily available to all staff at reception. These include:

- National Relay Service (NRS) found here
- Auslan services 1300 AUSLAN
- Translation and Interpreter Service (TIS) Doctors Priority Line 1300 131 450