

3 COMMUNICATION

It is the policy of this practice that all staff endeavour to obtain patient consent, either written or verbal, before initiating communication with or regarding a patient. The staff at our practice use a number of ways to communicate with patients, other staff and third parties to ensure we are providing an efficient and quality healthcare service.

Communication may occur in person, via phone, email, SMS, fax or post. All staff are familiar with the relevant legislation regarding patient health information, privacy and confidentiality. For further information, please refer to this practice's Privacy Policy and Medical Records Policy.

3.1 Email Correspondence, Internet Usage and Social Media

Policy

It is the policy of this practice that all practice owned devices and networks will be used for conducting business activities, with reasonable personal use of email and internet communications permitted. The acceptable use of the internet and email is provided to primarily assist the practice team to carry out their duties of employment. This policy applies to all practice staff and the other staff of Imbina Medical Centre, who access the internet and email on practice owned devices, including but not limited to the BWHCC practice server, to perform their work.

This practice recognises that the practice staff will require access to email and the internet to assist in the efficient and safe delivery of healthcare services to our patients. Use of the internet is permitted and encouraged where this supports the goals and objectives of Blackwater Health Care Centre. Access to the internet is a privilege and the practice staff and other staff must adhere to this policy. Staff are required to confirm they have understood and agree to abide by this email and internet policy – see [IMC-F16-Confidentiality Agreement](#).

Violation of these policies could result in disciplinary or legal action, termination of employment or being held personally liable for damages caused. Action taken will be decided at the time of the policy breach by the Practice Manager and Practice Principal.

Should there be any email or internet issues, staff will need to inform the Office Manager or Practice Manager as soon as possible, and the practice's designated IT support – Wade Hunt IT on 49 222 333.

3.1.1 Email correspondence

Policy

All incoming and outgoing practice email correspondence will be performed using practice owned software and devices. This practice provides a single email address for all general practice email correspondence, reception@imbinamc.com.au, which all authorised staff have access to. A single email address is used for the Practice Manager for any sensitive or confidential email correspondence, glendamarin@imbinamc.com.au, is also provided.

It is the policy of this practice that all email correspondence is appropriately secure with encryption software. This practice uses Outlook TLS with more information available from Wade Hunt IT.

Confidential or sensitive information or records will not be sent via email or over the internet unless encrypted.

3.1.2 Incoming email correspondence

All email correspondence received will be processed according to our practices privacy management policy, and in accordance with relevant legislation such as The Privacy Act 1988. Incoming email correspondence will be prioritised and actioned according to matters of urgency and those that are less time sensitive.

All authorised non-clinical staff will:

- Check the email inbox at the beginning of each shift.
- Action items according to urgency
- Inform Clinical staff where required for action or follow up using the internal message software or in person.
- Print any attachments, such as forms, requests, results etc. and file, scan or forward to appropriate person or inbox.
- Scan all patient results directly to the doctor's inbox using the bulk scanner software.
- Scan all records requests to the patient's file. Any action will be recorded and completed only with consent.
- Flag any emails that require non-urgent follow up action.
- Monitor email inbox at regular intervals throughout their shift.
- Delete any offensive, obscure or threatening emails and those that come from an untrustworthy or unknown source.

3.1.3 Outgoing Email Correspondence

All outgoing email correspondence will be handled in accordance with the practice's Privacy Management Policy, and in accordance with any relevant legislation such as The Privacy Act 1988 and the Australian Privacy Principles guidelines, (APP's).

Staff must ensure informed patient consent has been obtained before the collection, use and or disclosure of any patient health information. Informed consent is ensuring the patient is made aware of:

- What information is required,
- The purpose the information is required,
- How this information will be collected
- How, and if, this information will be disclosed,
- How this information will be stored
- Consequences, if any, for not providing informed consent

Informed patient consent can be obtained either verbally or in writing and should be current and specific to the reason for the request.

The practice's email correspondence is protected with encryption software to ensure sensitive information is secure during transfer. It is the policy of this practice that all outgoing email correspondence is encrypted using Outlook TLS software.

Procedure

1. Ensure consent to send information via email has been obtained, either signed consent through **IMC-F2-Patient Information Sheet, IMC-F69-Consent to Patient Information Collection & Use**, assumed consent through email request or verbal consent where circumstances permit.
2. Scan required documents, patient records etc. to the practice's designated scans folder, naming file to ensure correct documents are attached to email.
3. Open practice's email software and click 'new email'.
4. Enter correct recipient email address into 'To' address bar.
5. Enter email details into 'Subject' bar.
6. Click on 'Attach Item' and select correct document from designated scans folder.
7. Complete message with reason for email.
8. Ensure staff member's email signature is correct.
9. Check email details, attachments and recipient address is correct before selecting 'Send'.
10. Document email correspondence in patient file where necessary.
11. Scan all necessary documents to the patient's file.
12. Destroy all documents using the practice's shredder.

3.1.4 Email Disclaimer

This practice uses the following confidentiality and privilege notice on all outgoing email correspondence;

'This email and any attachments are confidential and should only be used by the intended recipient. You must not use or disclose this information other than for the purposes for which it was supplied. The privilege or confidentiality attached to this message and attachments is not waived by reason of mistaken delivery. If you are not the intended recipient, you must not use, disclose, retain, forward or reproduce this message or any attachments. If you received this message in error, please notify the sender by return email or telephone and destroy and delete all copies.'

This practice has configured the mail software so that the above confidentiality and privilege notice is automatically added to each outgoing email.

Criterion C 6.4 ➤F

3.2 Internet Usage

The staff of this practice will have access to the internet to assist in the efficient and safe delivery of quality healthcare services to our patients. Internet usage is permitted and encouraged where it supports the staff in meeting practice goals and objectives and in continuing to provide our patients with relevant information specific to patient needs.

Internet access is via a modem connection. This practice uses Business Gateway.

3.3 Social Media

Policy

Social media is a means of communication in which individuals, groups, businesses and consumers, can utilise to engage, educate, inform, advertise and develop an online profile with other groups, clients, communities, and social media users. It is the policy of this practice, that social media platforms, such as Facebook, will be used to communicate, network and share content with our patients and the wider community.

The primary persons responsible for this practice's social media platforms

Glenda Martin	Practice Manager
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Only authorised staff who have been nominated by the primary persons responsible for this practice's social media platforms will have access and permission to upload, change, edit or add approved content. The content this practice shares will be in accordance with relevant legislation, such as The Privacy Act 1988, and the practice's policies regarding privacy, confidentiality and security and information technology.

There will be no sensitive patient health information shared on this practice's social media platforms.

Criterion C6.4 ➤G

3.4 Telephone

Policy

The practice has designated telephones in each room/area, with six active telephone lines that are switched to 'Day Service' during the practice's hours of operation. The telephones are switched over to 'Night Service' outside of the practice's normal hours of operation, with a recorded message advising callers to hang up and

dial '000' if it is an emergency, the afterhours number for any afterhours medical care and our normal hours of operation.

The telephones will be used to communicate with patients, staff and third parties, with all calls assessed using the practice's triage procedure and prioritised according to urgency and appointment availability. The staff will endeavour to ensure all patient concerns, queries and appointment bookings are handled with professionalism and as efficiently as possible.

All practice staff will refer to this practice's policies and procedures regarding **7. Privacy, 7.12 Confidentiality** and **6. Patient Health Information Management** before any information or patient records are shared or disclosed.

3.5 Mail

This practice receives written correspondence in the form of patient health information, records, specialist letters and reports, results, invoices, statements, medical and office supplies and vaccines etc via our street address or postal box. The post box is accessed using a key by authorised staff only on a regular basis or when required.

This practice also distributes written communications in the form of reminders, recalls, invoices, statements and patient records when it cannot be done using secure messaging, such as Medical Objects, email, faxes or using a telephone.

3.5.1 Handling Incoming Mail

Policy

In this practice, the reception staff are responsible for the collection and sorting of all incoming mail.

All incoming mail relating to a patient must be seen by the doctor. Patient information should be scanned to the doctor's inbox using the bulk document import program. Urgent Patient information such as results, should never be scanned to the patient health file without having been seen by the doctor and only then should the information be scanned to the doctor's inbox using the bulk document import program, or directly into the patient's file. All mail is opened unless marked private or confidential.

Procedure

1. Separate the mail based on advertising, personal and patient information.
2. Open all mail that is not marked private and confidential.
3. Use the office stamp to record the date that the mail was opened and record initials.
4. Insert any personal mail, advertising or professional development opportunities into the Doctor's tray located in the reception area.
5. If Doctor is a locum, insert mail addressed to Doctor in his/her tray.
6. If Doctor is away, hold all personal mail addressed to him/her until they return.
7. The doctor is to sign and record the requested action on each piece of mail before returning it to reception for follow up if necessary.
8. Place all mail in the basket to be shredded once it has been actioned and scanned to patient file.

3.5.2 Outgoing Mail

All outgoing mail, such as patient records or other patient health information, that cannot be sent via any other secure means, must not be distributed without written or verbal consent. Requests for patient records should have a signed written consent and be logged in the outgoing mail register.

Procedure

1. All outgoing mail will be placed in an appropriately sized postage paid envelope, stamped with the practice stamp displaying our details.
2. Patients who cannot be contacted by telephone for recalls and reminders will be sent a written reminder by mail. Recall and reminder letters will be placed in the outgoing mail tray.
3. All outgoing mail, such as general mail, invoices, statements etc. will be placed in an appropriate sized postage paid envelope, stamped with the practice details and placed in the outgoing mail tray.
4. Patient records that need to be sent via post, and where consent has been obtained, will be placed in an appropriate sized postage paid envelope, stamped with the practice details and placed in the outgoing mail tray.
5. The patient's name, the recipient, what records are being posted and the date will be recorded in the 'Outgoing Mail Register'.
6. A staff member will collect the mail from the outgoing mail tray, place it in the practice's mail bag and take it in to the local Post Office for processing.
7. The staff member will need to provide the practice's account details and sign the receipt.
8. The Post Office will provide an extra copy of the receipt, this receipt will be placed inside the 'Outgoing Mail Register' for proof of postage or follow up if necessary.
9. Urgent correspondence will be delivered to the Post Office when required.

3.6 SMS

This practice currently uses SMS appointment reminders that are generated through the online booking agent, Hot Docs. SMS messaging is sent one day prior to the patient's appointment and in accordance with Privacy legislation. Communication via SMS outside of the appointment reminder system is not permitted.

3.7 Internal Communication

Policy

For this practice to function effectively, staff are aware of the current status of issues and progress with all aspects of our service.

To this end the following methods of communication are used:

- ✓ Verbal
- ✓ Written Telephone Messages
- ✓ Internal electronic Bp software messaging system
- ✓ Regular staff meetings
- ✓ Clinical meetings with doctors are held as requested by Doctor.
- ✓ Memos, facsimile and e-mail.
- ✓ Hardcopy computer print-outs.
- ✓ Informal discussions.
- ✓ Yearly Planner
- ✓ Staff Notice Board/Whiteboard
- ✓ Policy and Procedure Manual.

To maintain and enhance communication, continuing education and professional development is encouraged for all staff. Staff report back via staff meetings and informal discussions. Staff are required to read, understand and contribute to updates for policies and procedures as needed.

Urgent daily notices and other general items for immediate attention should be actioned accordingly.

Please refer to Section **12.6 – Clinical Meetings** for further information about this policy.

3.8 Practice Communication and Teamwork

Policy

It is the policy of this practice that positive open communication between staff members and between staff members and management, is encouraged. Our practice is committed to creating a working environment that promotes teamwork and respects and values all staff input. This practice has an Internal grievance policy for any staff should they have a grievance or complaint and a procedure for staff to escalate the issue if they are unhappy with the outcome or resolution process.

Please refer to **Section 5.21 Staff Grievances and Complaints** and **11.9 Internal Grievance Procedures**.

3.9 Patients of Foreign Background, Ethnicity, Hearing or Visual Impairment

Policy

We provide a health service for a diverse multicultural & impaired population. Patients who do not use English as their primary language, or who may have a visual or hearing impairment, have the choice of utilising the Translating and Interpreting Service, (TIS) or a translator, a family member or friend, or a bilingual staff member.

The doctors at this practice are registered with TIS.

Dr Muhammad Zaman Dr Sasigala Vasudevan Dr Rama Burra	TIS NATIONAL CLIENT CODE	C957854 C958133 C971140
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This practice encourages the use of the free Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) – Doctors Priority Line 1300 131 450 and the Refugee Health Network Qld on 07 3163 8559, as we consider it the right of all patients with limited English to be provided with a professional interpreter. Our visual and hearing-impaired patients are able to utilise the services of various organisations such as National Auslan Interpreter Booking Service (NABS) 1800 24 69 35.

Refer to section 2 of this manual for a list of our practice's Service Provider Contacts.

Criterion – C1.4 >A, B

3.10 Covid 19 Best Practice

Policy

It is the policy of this practice to adhere to all relevant Queensland Government health regulations and recommendations for best practice regarding the current Covid 19 pandemic. All Covid 19 correspondence, such as the Queensland Government Public Health Alerts, are circulated among all staff and stored in the 'Covid 19 Information' folder located in reception.

All pertinent general information will be displayed in the waiting room for patient education and communication.

For those patients wishing to make an appointment via the telephone, the staff member will implement the practice's 'Covid 19 Triage Procedure'. This triage will include questions regarding;

- Flu like symptoms
- Recently returned from overseas travel
- Recently returned from a designated Covid 19 hotspot
- Had contact with someone known to have Covid 19

At this time, Medicare have introduced Covid 19 telephone consultation and video conference item numbers for eligible patients. For those patients who may answer yes to the above questions and have seen a doctor at this practice in the last 12 months, a telephone consultation or video conference may be offered. This practice will continue to offer these Covid 19 consultations while available and at the doctor's discretion.

This practice does not offer the Covid-19 test, patients are able to have this test at the Blackwater Hospital or the Fever Clinic in Emerald.

Masks are available on request and any patient with flu like symptoms is asked to wear a mask and adhere to social distancing guidelines while visiting the practice. A hand sanitiser station is available to all visitors, who are asked to sanitise on arrival.

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Reviewed by: Michelle Window, Office Manager and Glenda Martin, Practice Manager

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