**Email Use**

**Policy**

Health information is considered one of the most sensitive types of personal information. The Privacy Act 1988 (Privacy Act) provides extra protections around the collection, use or disclosure of health information. Whilst the Privacy Act does not prescribe how healthcare organisations should communicate health information, reasonable steps must be taken to protect the information transmitted and the privacy of the patient.

What is considered reasonable steps will depend on the nature of the information and the potential for harm caused by unauthorised access. Failure to take reasonable steps to protect health information may constitute a breach of the Australian Privacy Principles (APPs).

Berwick Healthcare recognises email is one of the most prevalent and convenient forms of communication and that the use of unencrypted and unsecured email can create risks to the privacy and security of personal and sensitive health information. We often receive requests from patients, other clinicians and third parties to send health information via email and have taken steps to ensure it is safe and secure before using email.

All forms of written communication involve an element of risk that information could be read by someone other than the intended recipient. The risks of using unsecured or unencrypted email include:

* emails can easily be sent to the wrong recipient
* email is often accessed on portable devices, such as smart phones, tablets and laptops, which are easily lost or stolen
* emails can be forwarded or changed without the knowledge or consent of the original sender
* email is vulnerable to interception.

Because of the risks of email and fax communication, the RACGP has long been a strong advocate for the use of secure electronic communications as the most efficient and appropriate method of communication across the healthcare sector.

**Procedure**

Berwick Healthcare aims to follow RACGP’s Low Risk assessment:

* Documented policies and resources exist.
* Consent from patient is obtained and recorded.
* Email address is verified by the practice before sending an email.
* Emails are sent with password protection OR email communications are sent using encryption software or via a secure website.

The following automated replies have been installed on each doctors Berwick Healthcare email address to ensure patients are aware of risks and that patient requests are responded to.

Automatic Email Replies

All email correspondence is directed to reception@berwickhealthcare.com.au

Doctors email addresses have the below automated response advising the sender to contact reception as these emails are not monitored.

*This email address is not monitored and will not be responded to. Please contact reception on Ph 97961500 or* *reception@berwickhealthcare.com.au*

*If you require health information to be sent to you we will need your written consent. In some circumstances an appointment with your doctor may be required. Please complete the below and forward this email to* *reception@berwickhealthcare.com.au* *with your request. Berwick Healthcare will make every attempt to keep your health information secure and will use a password protected program.*

*I (insert your name)*

*of (insert your address)*

*(insert your Date of Birth) / /*

*Understand the below risks of using email to send healthcare information are -*

* *Information could be read by someone other than the intended recipient.*
* *emails can easily be sent to the wrong recipient*
* *email is often accessed on portable devices, such as smart phones, tablets and laptops, which are easily lost or stolen*
* *emails can be forwarded or changed without the knowledge or consent of the original sender •*
* *email is vulnerable to interception.*

*I request the following information -*