

University Health Network Policy & Procedure Manual Administrative: Consent for Use of Email

Policy

Email is a critical administrative and clinical communications tool for use within the University Health Network (UHN) environment and between **UHN agents** (UHN employees, physicians/clinicians, learners, researchers, volunteers, observers, consultants, contractors, and other service provider/vendors who have access to UHN information and information technology) and the external community. Email messages are not encrypted on the UHN email system; therefore, UHN cannot guarantee the confidentiality and security of [unsecured email](#) messages. UHN ensures that the email system is used securely and appropriately in compliance with the [Personal Health Information Protection Act \(PHIPA\) 2004](#) and UHN policy.

[Personal health information \(PHI\)](#) and [corporate confidential information \(CCI\)](#) may be sent only to those who have a need to know the information to complete job duties or are explicitly authorized to receive the information for a specific job-related purpose, and may only be sent to [secure email](#) addresses. Email that contains PHI may not be sent to an unsecured email address, unless:

- Express consent to use email has been obtained from the individual to whom the PHI relates/research participant/patient in accordance with this policy.
- or**
- The email is required for a one-time, emergency health purpose. In such cases, the sender must follow up using alternative communication methods, such as phone or fax, to ensure that the information reaches the intended recipient and is handled with appropriate care.

Email communications containing clinically relevant information that relates to patient care must be copied or summarized in the patient chart.

All email messages to external users must contain a confidentiality disclaimer.

Care providers and clinics may have their own guidelines as to when they will communicate with patients using email. For example, some care providers and clinics may limit the types of information they will send by email.

A violation of this policy may result in the suspension or permanent disabling of an email user's account and may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment and/or affiliation with UHN.

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For policies guiding the appropriate use of email, see [Appropriate Use of Information & Information Technology](#) policy 1.40.012 and [Information Security](#) policy 1.40.028.

Express Consent to Use Email

Any UHN agent may:

- Obtain the patient's consent to communicate by email with UHN regarding their healthcare and/or to be contacted by their UHN care providers regarding research studies for which they may be eligible, by using the [Consent for Email Script](#) to provide the patient with information regarding:
 - a. how UHN may use email communication
 - b. the type of information that may be communicated by email
 - c. the limitations and risks of using email contained in [Using Email to Communicate with Your UHN Health Care Team](#) on the UHN website
- Advise the patient that they may withdraw their consent to receive email at any time by contacting their care provider or the UHN Privacy Office at (416) 340-4800 ext. 6937.

The UHN agent or their delegate must document the consent, refusal, or withdrawal of consent to communicate by email, including the date on which consent/refusal was obtained, in the email consent field on the registration page in the electronic patient record (EPR).

The patient's consent/refusal/withdrawal of consent to be contacted by their UHN care providers regarding research studies for which they may be eligible must be obtained separately from the consent to use email for care and documented separately in the Research field on the registration page in EPR.

Note: Consent for the use of email as part of a specific research study must be documented in the research study consent form.

Any UHN staff may rely on email consent documented on the registration page in EPR to use email to communicate with the patient for the above noted purposes.

Written Consent/Consent Form

UHN physicians or other staff may wish to obtain the patient's written express consent to communicate using email using the [Patient Consent for E-mail Communications](#) form (form D-2019M).

Note: Use of a written consent form to document a patient's consent to use email is not required by UHN but may be preferred by the clinician, and/or may be used in cases where a patient consents to use email only in limited circumstances.

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Where a patient consents to use email only in limited circumstances, this consent should **not** be documented in the EPR consent to email registration fields.

Definitions

Corporate confidential information (CCI): Information used for UHN management, business, or financial purposes, including, but not limited to:

- information about salaries and benefits
- information about Hospital payments such as OHIP numbers
- information about Hospital budgets, expenses, or planning
- patient health information or other data used by administration/management for logging, registering, scheduling, tracking, or billing patients
- sensitive or privileged legal information
- employee status information/communications regarding any employee
- information that could expose the organization's reputation to damage
- information regarding use of animals at UHN for research
- information regarding use of compounds or devices that could expose internal UHN operation to malicious acts by external parties (e.g. use of a compound or device that would signal to an activist group that certain types of experimentation are being carried out at UHN)

Personal health information (PHI): Information about an individual, whether living or deceased, and whether in oral or recorded form. It is information that can identify an individual and that relates to matters such as the individual's physical or mental health, the provision of healthcare to the individual, payments or eligibility for healthcare in respect of the individual, the donation by the individual of a body part or bodily substance, and the individual's health number. (PHIPA 2004)

PHI can be information about a physician or other care provider, a Hospital staff person, a patient, or a patient's family member. Examples of PHI include a name, medical record number, health insurance number, address, telephone number, and personal health information related to a patient's care, such as blood type, x-rays, consultation notes, etc.

Secure email: Refers to (1) internal email, i.e. email sent or received between any UHN email accounts or (2) email sent externally to an organization with which UHN has a secure channel. All email addresses that appear in the Global Address List are considered secure.

Unsecured email: Refers to any email sent or received between a UHN email account and an external organization's email account with which UHN does not have a secure channel. Only email addresses that are part of ONE Mail and One Pages infrastructure are considered secure.

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