



Text & Email Messaging

Policy

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Contents

Introduction.....	2
Scope of policy.....	2
Responsibilities, accountabilities, and duties	2
Approved and agreed uses for:-	2
Excluded uses of text messages and email	3
Consent.....	3
How will we communicate via Consent Model.....	3
Children	3
Recording of Emails and Texts within Patient File	3
Content of Emails/Texts.....	4
Monitoring Compliance	4
Dissemination.....	4



Introduction

It is recognised that the use of email and text messaging are well-established methods of communication. Cathays Surgery supports the use of email and text messaging as a means of communication with patients, and therefore is subject to compliance with this policy.

Scope of policy

This policy sets out the circumstances in which patients can be contacted with consent by email or text message and the procedures that must be followed when using this method of communication.

Patients will only be contacted in this way where they have consented to do so. Details of the approved and agreed uses of these communications are listed in the section below.

- The practice will never share this information with third parties.
- Health promotional material will only relate to services directly offered by the practice/cluster and will not include third party marketing material.

Responsibilities, accountabilities, and duties

This guidance applies and must be adhered to by those working within Cathays Surgery who use or who intend to use text messages and email in the course of their communication with patients. Policies and procedures have been read and understood by staff members who utilise this facility. There are processes for approving content of text messages ensuring that only approved text message announcements are used that have been approved by the Practice Manager for assurance of quality.

The Practice Manager has overall responsibility for the Cathays Surgery data. The Caldicott Guardian (a Caldicott Certified GP) is responsible for the establishment of procedures governing access to, and the use of, person-identifiable information and, where appropriate, the transfer of that information to other bodies. Practice Managers are responsible for making sure this guidance is highlighted to relevant staff, that it has been understood, and that it is being followed.

Approved and agreed uses for:

We have approved and agreed that the use of text messaging will be utilised for the following purposes within the practice:

- Changes to your booked appointment
- National issues such as Flu vaccinations, pandemics
- Practice being closed due to unforeseen circumstances
- Cancelled clinics including GP, Nurse and Health Care Assistant
- Other notifications the practice deem necessary to your health care provision

If the patient agrees, the GP practice will be contacting the patient via their mobile phone number, the practice agrees to adhere to the following: -

- The mobile phone number will only be used by the GP practice and will not be passed to any other parties.
- If at any time a patient informs the practice they would like to opt out of above service, the request will be actioned within 48 hours.
- The mobile phone number will solely be used by the practice in relation to the healthcare services offered and will not be utilised in relation to any other types of products or services.
- No personal details will be included in the message.

We have approved and agreed that the use of email messaging will be utilised for the following purposes: -

- Asking the patient to call the service at a convenient time
- Communicating advice to patient (e.g. bad weather reassurance of a Community Nurse visit)
- Ad-hoc communication between key worker and patient
- Copies of letters sent to GP if requested
- Appointment letters

Note: We may occasionally send helpful information to patients on an individual basis with permission from the patient. For example: during a consultation, we may ask if they would like us to text/email them a website link to a service they have been sign-posted to. These are only sent if agreed by the patient.

Excluded uses of text messages and email

The practice will not utilise text messaging or email for:

- Personal communication via this method i.e. consultation/discussing any medical needs/requirements
- Any form of marketing materials
- Personal relationships
- Requesting medication
- Selling on email address or mobile number to 3rd party for any purpose

Consent

A consent model will be used within the practice for usage of text messaging and emails, when contacting individual patients about their individual care or in line with approved and agreed uses.

It is important that any preferences are recorded in the patients record and respected. If at any time the patient would like to opt out of above service, the practice will ensure this occurs within 48 hours. The practice may also ask patients to include the reason for opting out, to help review and improve future service provision. The patient however is under no obligation to provide such information.

How will we communicate via Consent Model

It is essential that the use of email addresses and mobile telephone numbers are in line with transparency guidance and best practice. This means that the use of personal information held by the practice must be understood by the individual. The practice will provide its patients relevant information in relation to these services including:

- What information they need about them, e.g. mobile number
- For what purpose, e.g. to send appointment reminders
- Who the information may be shared with, e.g. it will not be shared
- What they will do with that information, e.g. it will be stored on your record.

The Practice shall clearly document the rationale for using email and /or text messaging to communicate with our patients and will clearly define the purpose and scope of communication by these means. This includes making our patients aware that text messages and emails will not be read during non-working hours and therefore should not be used for urgent queries. This information will be displayed on the practice website and through information in the waiting area which highlights the benefits to patients and service users and signposts them about how to give their consent via the Practice Privacy Notice.

Text messages / emails should **not** be utilised for any other purposes than those agreed and approved.

Children

The age at which a child becomes competent to make certain decisions about their health, care and information sharing will vary depending on the child and the particular situation.

A child with competence is able to make choices about how healthcare providers use their information. As such they should be given a choice about who receives emails and messages about their care.

The practice will review at least annually the consent of the child when communicating via text / email. Which should include a process to check that the mobile number is still valid and belongs to the child. (As some parents log their mobile number against a child's patient record).

Recording of Emails and Texts within Patient File

The practice has processes and procedures in place for recording emails/texts within the patient record. The practice also holds a retention policy for messages/emails, to ensure these are removed (from email/text storage) in a timely manner once the patient record is updated. Where this is not possible, an entry will be made in the record of the important elements of the email and subsequent actions.

Content of Emails/Texts

The practice have processes/procedures for approving content of text messages & emails, ensuring that only approved text/email messages are used that have been approved by the Practice Manager for assurance of quality. Bulk messages may be sent out to patients for such campaigns as flu vaccinations, the content will be approved and will not reveal your details to anyone else being sent the bulk communication.

Monitoring Compliance

Audit procedures and audit processes should be undertaken within the practice, this should include:

- The exchange of text messages with patients and practice has not created any problems or difficulties for practice or for the patient.
- Any risks are identified, regularly re-assessed, and adequately addressed.
- Confidentiality is not put at risk, and that appropriate records of contact are properly maintained.
- Any incidents that are raised as a result of email or text message communication with patients and service users will be investigated, reviewed, and reported to the Practice Manager.
- Any action required to increase the effectiveness of this policy will be undertaken.
- This policy will be regularly reviewed to reflect any changes to national policy, technology, or operational practice.

Dissemination

The policy will also be available on the Cathays Surgery website. www.cathayssurgery.co.uk