

Text and E-mail Messaging Policy

Introduction

It is recognised that the use of e-mail and text messaging are well-established methods of communication. Waunfawr Surgery supports the use of e-mail 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 e-mail or text message and the procedures that must be followed when using this method of communication. It also mentions the circumstances in which patients may contact the surgery through e-mail and what to expect.

Patients will only be contacted by the practice by text or e-mail 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 all those working within Waunfawr and Llanrug Surgery, who use or who intend to use text messages and e-mail during their communication with patients. Policies and procedures have been read and understood by staff members who utilise this facility. There are processes in place for approving content of text messages and e-mails, ensuring that only approved messages are used. Mrs Tegwen Hughes, the Practice Manager is responsible for assurance of quality.

Dr Eryllt Llwyd has overall responsibility for Waunfawr Surgery's data. She 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.

The Practice Manager is responsible for making sure this policy is highlighted to relevant staff, that it has been understood, and that it is being followed.

Approved and agreed uses for: -

Text Messages

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

- Appointment reminders
- Information about flu clinics
- Health promotion information
- Cancelled clinics including GP, Nurse and Health Care Assistant
- Changes in service provision.
- 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 for the purpose of text messaging.
- 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.

E-mail

We have approved and agreed that the use of e-mail 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 (relevant consent form must be completed first)
- Appointment letters

Patients can contact the surgery through e-mail to:-

- To request a repeat prescription
- To send medical photographs
- To request a non-urgent appointment
- To make a complaint
- General enquiries

Please note that e-mail contact should not be used for urgent enquiries.

When patients initiate contact by e-mail, they are consenting for the practice to contact them. All enquiries by e-mail will be initially replied to in the form of an automatic reply (to the original e-mail) outlining the timescales for reply.

E-mails should then be acknowledged by the surgery within 3 working days. Any complaints should be acknowledged within 2 days and acted upon within 30 days.

A two-way dialogue will be limited, and patients will be directed to make an appointment in an appropriate form. The practice staff will take reasonable steps to assure themselves that patients are who they say they are and for maintaining patient confidentiality.

It is recommended that patients use a private e-mail account rather than a family, work or shared account for the purpose of communication with the practice. It is up to the patient to ensure the correctness of their own e-mail settings. Internet e-mail accounts, such as those commonly used for private purposes are not always secure and patients must therefore be aware that there is a risk (however small) of the e-mail being intercepted or hacked.

Excluded uses of text messages and e-mail

The practice will not utilise text messaging or e-mail 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 e-mail address or mobile number to third party for any purpose

Consent

Patients can choose whether they consent for the usage of text messaging and e-mails when completing the Health Questionnaire whilst registering as a new patient. Current patients are already opted in automatically. If they wish to opt out, they are encouraged to contact the practice.

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.

It is the patients' responsibility to inform the surgery of any changes to their contact details.

How will we communicate via Consent Model?

It is essential that the use of e-mail 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 with 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 e-mail 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 e-mails 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 / e-mails 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 their situation.

A child with competence can make choices about how healthcare providers use their information. As such they should be given a choice about who receives e-mails and messages about their care.

Patients who are about to turn 16 years old will have the responsibility transferred to them from their parent/guardian.

The practice will review at least annually the consent of the child when communicating via text / e-mail, where there will be 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 E-mails and Texts within Patient File

The practice has processes and procedures in place for recording incoming and outgoing e-mails/texts within the patient record. Where this is not possible, an entry will be made in the record of the important elements of the e-mail and subsequent actions.

E-mails are classed as records and will be retained for the appropriate period in accordance with our retention policy.

Images provided by patients

In some cases, it may be appropriate for our health professionals to request for our patients to send an image of their ailment. These images will be captured and stored as part of the patients' clinical record.

The surgery will retain no responsibility for misdirected images by the patient. The surgery cannot guarantee that e-mails will be secure from being intercepted or hacked.

Further information is available by reading our 'Capturing and Obtaining Clinical Images Policy'. Please contact the Practice Manager to obtain a copy.

Content of E-mails/Texts

The practice has processes/procedures for approving content of text messages and e-mails, ensuring that only approved text/e-mail messages are used that have been approved by the Practice Manager for assurance of quality.

Bulk messages may be sent out to our patients for campaigns such as flu vaccinations/pandemics. The content will be approved and will not reveal patients' details to anyone else being sent the bulk communication. (Recipients should be selected in the BCC box rather than the TO box).

All outgoing messages should be issued bilingually, Welsh being first.

Monitoring Compliance

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

- That the exchange of text messages with patients and practice has not created any problems or difficulties for Waunfawr Surgery 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 because of e-mail 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

This policy is available on the Waunfawr Surgery website and on the waiting room noticeboard.

Review

This policy will be reviewed annually.