

Email Communication Consent for Patient / Substitute Decision Maker **Patients 16+yrs**

Dear (patient name)

At St. Joseph's Family Medicine Centre / Urban Family Health Team (SJHC FMC/UFHT) we continue to be committed to providing excellent care and to improving our communication with you and your family or substitute decision maker. This includes the use of email communication. Please note that all of the information contained in this consent form can be accessed at any time on our website: www.unityhealth.to/urbanfht

Background:

Healthcare providers in our team will have the option to communicate with patients by **email**. At SJHC FMC/UFHT we recognize the risks associated with the use of email communication. It is important for us that you are aware of these risks as well.

What does this mean for me?

We will use email for one-way transfer of information from your healthcare provider at SJHC FMC/UFHT to you. An email *may* be sent to you (and would *replace* a phone call) for a variety of reasons, such as: -

- inform or remind you of any upcoming appointments you may have
- send reminders about a test being done
- inform you of some non-critical, non-sensitive results
- send you patient education materials or resources
- advise you of upcoming programs and services we will offer
- send you invitations to participate in surveys

You will also be receiving information regarding referrals to specialists and other community services that are part of your circle of care (i.e. confirmed referral appointment dates, instructions for tests, etc.). This means that we will share your email address with these specialists and services in your circle of care.

**** All email communications will become a permanent part of your electronic medical record at our office****

Will I be able to respond to the email?

At this time, our email system will not receive replies (incoming emails). It is not meant for two-way communication between healthcare providers and patients/substitute decision makers. As such, **under no circumstances should you expect that any email you send to SJHC FMC/UFHT or its staff/physicians will be read or responded to.**

What are the risks of using email?

Sending patient-related information by email involves several risks that the patient/substitute decision maker should be aware of. SJHC FMC/UFHT patients/substitute decision makers who agree to communicate via email should understand and accept the associated risks. The risks include, but are not limited to, the following:

- The privacy and security of email communication cannot be guaranteed.
- Employers and online services may have a legal right to inspect and keep emails that pass through their system.
- Email is easier to falsify than handwritten or signed hard copies. In addition, it is impossible to verify the true identity of the sender, or to ensure that only the intended recipient can read the email, once an email has been sent.

- Emails can introduce viruses into a computer system and potentially damage or disrupt the computer.
- Email can be forwarded, intercepted, circulated, stored, or even changed without the knowledge or permission of SJHC FMC/UFHT staff or the patient.
- Email senders can easily misaddress an email, resulting in it being sent to many unintended and unknown recipients.
- Email is permanent. Even after the sender and recipient have deleted their copies of an email, back-up copies may exist on a computer or in cyberspace.
- The use of email to discuss sensitive information can increase the risk of such information being disclosed to third parties.
- Email can be used as evidence in court.

What are the conditions of using email?

SJHC FMC/UFHT healthcare providers and staff will use reasonable means to protect the security and confidentiality of email information sent. However, because of the risks outlined above, SJHC FMC/UFHT healthcare providers and staff cannot guarantee the security and confidentiality of email communication, and will not be liable for improper disclosure of confidential information that is not the direct result of intentional misconduct by the healthcare provider or staff person. Thus, patients/substitute decision makers must consent to the use of email to communicate information related to patient care.

Consent to the use of email includes agreement with the following conditions:

- Emails to the patient/substitute decision maker concerning diagnosis or treatment may be made part of the patient's medical record. Because they are part of the medical record, other individuals authorized to access the medical record, such as staff and billing personnel, will also have access to those emails.
- Email communication is not an appropriate substitute for clinical examinations. The patient/substitute decision maker is responsible for following up on anything that a SJHC FMC/UFHT healthcare provider or staff person has communicated via email, and for scheduling appointments when warranted.
- Given that email is initially being used as a one-way only method of communication, the patient/substitute decision maker should under no circumstances expect a response regarding any email sent to SJHC FMC/UFHT or its healthcare providers or staff.
- SJHC FMC/UFHT is not responsible for information loss due to technical failures, and the patient/substitute decision maker is responsible for keeping track of appointment dates and times.
- The patient/substitute decision maker **MUST** be 16 years of age or older.
- The patient/substitute decision maker will notify SJHC FMC/UFHT should there be any change to his/her most current email address.

What are my responsibilities regarding email communication?

To receive communication by email, the patient/substitute decision maker shall:

- limit or avoid using an employer's computer –
- inform SJHC FMC/UFHT of any changes to his/her email address –
- check their "junk mail" folder if they don't see emails from SJHC FMC/UFHT in their inbox, and add our familymedicine.sjhc@unityhealth.to email address to their "safe senders" list –
- take precautions to preserve the confidentiality of emails, such as using screen savers and safeguarding computer passwords –

withdraw consent (if necessary) only by written communication to the SJHC FMC/UFHT staff.

Should the patient require immediate assistance, or if the patient's condition appears serious or rapidly worsens, the patient/substitute decision maker must not rely on email. Rather, the patient/substitute decision maker should call our clinic for consultation or an appointment, visit our clinic office, or take other measures as appropriate.

What if my email address changes?

It is your responsibility to notify us should your email address change at any given time. The management and security of your email account is also your responsibility. We strongly encourage you to use a personal email address, and not a work-based email address, for communication with the SJHC FMC/UFHT team.

We will continue to advise you of any changes occurring as a result of future improvements in email communication. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask your healthcare provider and he/she will be happy to clarify any information you may need.

Consent for Patients Age 16 and Over

I, _____ acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the information contained in this consent form.

By consenting I agree that:

- I wish to receive email communication from healthcare providers/staff associated with SJHC FMC/UFHT.
- I understand the risks associated with communication by email between SJHC FMC/UFHT healthcare providers/staff and me, and I consent to the conditions and responsibilities outlined above.
- I will comply with any further instructions that the SJHC FMC/UFHT healthcare providers/staff may impose to communicate with patients /substitute decision makers by email in the future.
- I acknowledge the rights of the SJHC FMC/UFHT healthcare providers/staff to, upon the provision of written notice, withdraw the option of communicating by email.
- I hereby waive, release, and discharge from any and all liability, St. Joseph's Health Centre, its employees, and all physicians connected in any way with me as a patient, for any complications which may arise from the use of email.
- I indemnify and hold harmless the entities or persons noted above from any and all liabilities or claims made by other individuals or entities as a result of my decision.
- I agree to abide by the terms of this agreement and consent.
- I am aware that I can access all of the information contained in this consent form at any time on SJHC FMC/UFHT's website.

Any questions I may have had were answered to my satisfaction.

I, _____, confirm that I agree to these terms and I wish to receive email communication from SJHC FMC/UFHT for the purposes of my clinical care.