

# The Proper Use of eMail in Healthcare

There has been a great discussion and some confusion around the collection and use of email addresses for communicating between providers and patients. We offer the following information to help clarify this topic.

## **The Regulatory Background**

Under the “Meaningful Use” section of The Affordable Care Act, providers are required to provide access to patients to view, download, and transmit their health data in both human and machine readable formats.

Meaningful Use required that in 2014, 50% of patients must be able to view, download, and transmit health data, and further requires that providers be able to demonstrate that 5% actually have viewed, downloaded, and transmitted health data. These standards will ensure your reimbursement rates for Medicare and Medicaid patients.

## **Communicating with Your Patients**

Most everyone has an email address, but many times patients do not want to give you their email address or say they do not have an email address because they are worried about receiving unwanted marketing messages. In our experience with over 700 hospitals, surgical centers and physician groups, we have found that providing a clear message on the authorized use of their email or mobile phone information, along with solemn assurances that they will be protected, quickly overcomes these concerns.

## **3 Suggested Patient Protection Messages**

Three different “messages” for patient concerned about providing you with an email address:

### **Option 1: Short and Sweet**

Your email and mobile phone number will only be used for healthcare related communications, including access to and information about your healthcare with our facility. Your email will never be sold, given, used or revealed for any other purpose than communication about your healthcare and our services to assist you. These protections are a matter of law under HIPAA – The Federal Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996.

### **Option 2: More Informative**

Providing us with an email address and/or mobile phone number makes it easier for us to communicate with you reliably and securely about such things as your appointments, health information, and your insurance or personal financial payments.

Your email or phone number will be used only for this purpose. It will never be sold, given, used or revealed for any other purpose. These protections are a matter of law under HIPAA – The Federal Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996.

### **Option 3: Specific to Your Facility’s Services**

All personal communication information, such as email address or mobile phone number, will only be used to communicate directly with you regarding your personal health or account information. Examples of this communication are as follows:

- Appointment scheduling
- Communicating with physicians, nursing or business office staff
- Health related information or results
- Informing you of new charges, or payments posted on your account
- Informing you of additional financial assistance options for which you may qualify

Your email or phone number will be used only for this purpose. It will never be sold, given, used or revealed for any other purpose. These protections are a matter of law under HIPAA – The Federal Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996.