

# PRINCE EDWARD MEDICAL

## Email Communication Policy

*Dear Patient,*

At Prince Edward Medical (PEM), we are trying to improve our communication with you and your family or substitute decision maker. This includes the use of email.

Our goal as healthcare providers at PEM is use email to communicate with our patients/substitute decision makers in order to improve communication and timely care for you and your family.

Please take a few minutes to familiarize yourself with our email policy, designed to ensure your privacy while improving your health care experience.

### **Background**

Healthcare providers in our team will have the option to communicate with patients by email. At PEM, 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. We recommend that you consult the Canadian Medical Protective Association (CMPA) information sheet about the legal risks of communicating with patients by email:

### **[Using electronic communications, protecting privacy](#)**

### **What does this mean for me?**

PEM will have TWO email capabilities, both of which are for NON-urgent issues ONLY and may not be responded to for up to 72 business hours:

- 1.) Booking NON-urgent appointments at PEM via [booking@princeedwardmedical.ca](mailto:booking@princeedwardmedical.ca). You may email our front staff to book an appointment for yourself, child or elderly parent (if given permission by parent). These requests are NOT read by doctors or nurses and NO medical information may be requested or given. The purpose is to simply try to facilitate access to our front desk.

2.) Sending information to you: this will be a one-way transfer of information from your healthcare provider at PEM to you via info@princeedwardmedical.ca. An email may be sent to you (and would replace a phone call) for a variety of reasons. These include: to inform or remind you of any upcoming specialist appointments, to request that you contact the office to book an in-person or phone appointment, send reminders about required tests or requisitions for further tests that may be necessary to inform you of certain results (NOT all results), send you patient education materials or resources, and advise you of upcoming programs and services we will offer. All email communication will become a permanent part of your electronic medical record at our office.

### **What are the risks of using email?**

PEM offers patients/substitute decision makers the opportunity to communicate using email. Sending patient-related information by email involves several risks which the patient/substitute decision maker should be aware of. PEM 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:

- 1.) The privacy and security of email communication cannot be guaranteed.
- 2.) Employers and online services may have a legal right to inspect and keep emails that pass through their system.
- 3.) Email is easier to falsify than handwritten or signed hard copies. In addition, it is impossible to verify the true identify of the sender, or to ensure that only the intended recipient can read the email, once an email has been sent.
- 4.) Email can introduce viruses into a computer system and potentially damage or disrupt the computer.
- 5.) Email can be forwarded, intercepted, circulated, stored, or even changed without the knowledge or permission of the PEM staff or the patient.
- 6.) Email senders can easily misaddress an email, resulting in it being sent to many unintended and unknown recipients.

7.) 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.

8.) The use of email to discuss sensitive information can increase the risk of such information being disclosed to third parties.

9.) Email can be used as evidence in court.

### **What are the conditions of using email?**

PEM healthcare providers and staff will use reasonable means to protect the security and confidentiality of email information sent and/or received. However, because of the risks outlined above, PEM 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:

1.) 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.

2.) Email communication is not an appropriate substitute for clinical examinations. The patient/substitute decision maker is responsible for following up on anything that PEM healthcare provider or staff person has communicated via email, and for scheduling appointments when warranted.

3.) Given that email (for purposes OTHER THAN booking appointments) is always used as a ONE-WAY ONLY method of communication, the patient/substitute decision maker should NOT respond to or expect a response from any email sent from PEM healthcare providers or staff.

4.) The patient/substitute decision maker should never attempt to use email for communication regarding sensitive medical information, which may include sexually transmitted infections, HIV/AIDS, mental health,

developmental disability, substance abuse, or any other psychosocial and/or medical complications. Similarly, the healthcare provider will not discuss such matters over email.

5.) PEM is not responsible for information loss due to technical failures.

6.) The patient/substitute decision maker must be 16 years of age or older.

7.) The patient/substitute decision maker will notify PEM should there be any change to his/her email address.

### **What are my responsibilities regarding email communication?**

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

1.) Limit or avoid using an employer's computer.

2.) Inform PEM of any changes to your email address.

3.) Take precautions to preserve the confidentiality of emails, such as using screen savers and safeguarding computer passwords.

4.) If you have opted to be reached via email, it is your responsibility to check your email and follow up on tests or requests. If you have questions, or have not received expected requisitions or results, you are responsible for calling PEM to clarify any concerns.

5.) Withdraw consent (if necessary) only by written communication to the PEM staff.

6.) 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.

### **How do I sign up?**

In order for us to be able to send any emails to your identified email address, we ask that you:

1.) Read the information contained in this letter.

2.) Fill out the PEM email terms of use form

**Note:** You will be receiving a confirmation “welcome” email after sign up to ensure that your email address is functioning and has been entered into our system correctly. If you do not receive this email within one week of signing up, please phone our office at 647-345-3048 to inform us.

**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 PEM team.

Currently “Hotmail” accounts do not function with our system, and unfortunately cannot be used.

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.

If you are comfortable with our policies, please fill out the email terms of use form.

*Sincerely,*

*Staff and Physicians at Prince Edward Medical*

***Acknowledgements***

*This information package was originally developed by St. Joseph's Healthcare Centre, Urban Family Health Team in Toronto for their use. It has been modified for use by Prince Edward Medical.*