

Dear Patient:

Physicians have always protected the confidentiality of health information by sealing medical records away in file cabinets and refusing to reveal your information. Today, state and federal laws also attempt to ensure the confidentiality of this sensitive information.

The federal government recently published regulations designed to protect the privacy of your health information. This “privacy rule” protects health information that is maintained by physicians, hospitals, other health care providers and health plans. Physicians have until April 14, 2003, to comply with the privacy rule’s standards for protecting the confidentiality of your health information.

This new regulation protects virtually all patients regardless of where they live or where they receive their health care. Every time you see a physician, are admitted to the hospital, fill a prescription, or send a claim to a health plan, your physician, the hospital or other health care provider will need to consider the privacy rule. All health information including paper records, oral communications, and electronic formats (such as e-mail) are protected by the privacy rule.

The privacy rule also provides you certain rights, such as the right to have access to your medical records. However, there are exceptions; these rights are not absolute. We also take precautions in our office to safeguard your health information such as training our employees and employing computer security measures. Please feel free to ask your physician or our privacy officer about exercising your rights or how your health information is protected in our office.

The Notice of Privacy Practices attached to this letter explains our privacy practices. It contains very important information about how your confidential health information is handled by our office. It also describes how you can exercise your rights with regard to your protected health information.

Please let us know if you have any questions about our Notice of Privacy Practices. You may contact our Privacy Officer at (205)-933-9036, or discuss any questions you may have with your physician.

R. W. Waguespack, MD, PC

Notice of Privacy Practices

This notice describes a summary of how medical information about you may be used and disclosed and how you can get access to this information. Please review this information carefully. If you wish to view an unabridged copy or if you have any questions about this information, please contact our office manager, Carolyn Ogle.

This Notice of Privacy Practices describes how we may use and disclose your protected health information to carry out treatment, payment or health care operations, and for other purposes that are permitted or required by law. It also describes your rights to access and control your protected health information. "Protected health information" is information about you, including demographic information, that may identify you and that relates to your past, present or future physical or mental health conditions and related health care services.

You will be asked to sign a consent form. This indicates your consent for the records to be used and disclosed as needed with regard to the following:

- I. Treatment
 - To home health agencies
 - To laboratories
 - To other doctors also responsible for your care
- II. Payment
 - To worker's compensation agencies
 - To medical insurance companies
 - To collection agencies
- III. Health Care Operations
 - To billing/transcription services
 - On sign-in sheets at the front desk
 - When patients are called by name from the waiting room

Information will be disclosed only to the family members and/or friends indicating by the patient/guardian on his or her consent form.

Records may be used or disclosed without your consent if needed:

- During a medical emergency
- If required by a public health, health oversight, or government agency
- If involving communicable diseases, abuse/neglect, or crime

Patient Rights

The following is a statement of your rights with respect to your protected health information.

- You have the right to inspect and copy your protected health information. This pertains to information contained in your designated record set for as long as we maintain the protected health information. You may not inspect or copy psychotherapy notes or information compiled for preparation or use in a civil, criminal, or administrative proceeding.
- You have the right to request a restriction of your health information. Your request must state the specific restriction requested and to whom you want the restriction to apply. Your physician is not required to agree to a restriction, if he believes that it is in your best interest to permit use and disclosure of your protected health information.
- You have the right to request to receive confidential communications from us by alternative means or at an alternative location. We will accommodate reasonable requests. Please make this request in writing to our Privacy Contact.
- You have the right to have your physician amend your protected health information. This pertains to information contained in your designated record set for as long as we maintain the protected health information. In certain cases we may deny your request for an amendment, and you may file a statement of disagreement with us.
- You have the right to receive an accounting of certain disclosures we have made, if any, of your protected health information. This right applies to purposes other than treatment, payment, or health care operations, and excludes disclosures made to you, to involved family members or friends, or for notification purposes. This applies to disclosures occurring after April 14, 2003.
- You have the right to obtain a paper copy of this notice from us, upon request.

You may complain to us or to the Secretary of Health and Human Services if you believe your privacy rights have been violated by us. You may file a complaint with us by notifying our privacy contact of your complaint. We will not retaliate against you for filing a complaint.

You may contact our Privacy Contact, Carolyn Ogle, at (205)-933-9036 for further information about the complaint process.

This notice was published and becomes effective on September 30, 2002.