



# Northside Family Medicine, P.C.

## **Online Communications Informed Consent** updated 9/27/09

### **Instructions for Using Online Communications with Northside Family Medicine**

You agree to take steps to keep your online communications to and from Northside Family Medicine confidential including:

- Do not store messages on your employer-provided computer; otherwise personal information could be accessible or owned by your employer
- Use screen savers or close your messages instead of leaving your messages on the screen for passers-by to read. Keep your password safe and private.
- Do not allow other individuals or other third party access to the computer(s) upon which you store medical messages or other personal medical information.
- If you have or learn of any personal email addresses that I use, you will not use them for medical communications. Standard email lacks security and privacy features and may expose medical communications to employers or other unintended third parties.
- Withdrawal of this Informed Consent must be done by written online communications or in writing to the office.

Use good communications etiquette:

- Confirm that your name and other personal information in the message are correct.
- Review the message before sending it to make sure that it is clear and that all relevant information is provided.
- Update your contact information on the network as soon as it changes including any changes to your regularly used email address.

### **Charges for Using Online Communications**

Northside Family Medicine may charge you for certain online communications. You will be informed when/if these charges apply and you will be responsible for payment of these charges if you accept and use any fee-based service. You may choose to contact your local insurance carrier to determine if they cover online communications.

### **Conditions of Using Online Communications -The following agreements and procedures relate to online communications:**

- Northside Family Medicine will print out a copy of all medically important online communications and include them in your medical record. This means that appropriate members of the staff will have access to these communications as part of our medical records keeping, treatment, and billing, and as defined in “Notice of Privacy Practices for Protected Health Information.”
- You should print or store (on a secure computer or storage device that is owned and controlled by you) a copy of all online communications that are important to you.
- The practice will not forward online communications with you to any third parties except as authorized or required by law.
- You agree to follow the procedures that Northside Family Medicine implements and that you will allow the practice to verify your identity in connection with any online communications. You also acknowledge that failure to comply with these procedures may terminate our online communications.
- Online communications will be used for limited purposes. It cannot be used for emergencies or time sensitive matters. It should be used with care and caution. It should not be used to communicate highly sensitive medical information, such as treatment for or information related to HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases, or addiction treatments (alcohol, drug dependence, etc.). If there is other information that you don't want transmitted via online communications, you must inform the practice in writing.
- Northside Family Medicine will make every attempt to respond within the time-frame designated. However, there may be times when this is not feasible, and you understand and agree to accept variations in response times and use other forms of communication with the practice if the response times are not satisfactory to you. Please note that online communications should never be used for emergency communications or urgent requests. These should occur via telephone or using existing emergency communications tools.
- While Northside Family Medicine will take all reasonable precautions to protect your information, the practice is not and will not be liable for improper disclosure of confidential information unless it was caused by the practice's intentional misconduct.
- Follow-up is your responsibility. You are responsible for scheduling any necessary appointment and for determining if an unanswered online communication wasn't received.
- You are responsible for taking steps to protect yourself from unauthorized use of online communications, such as keeping your password confidential. Northside Family Medicine is not responsible for breaches of confidentiality caused by you or an independent third party.
- The practice will not engage in any illegal online communications, including knowingly illegally practicing medicine across state lines.

### **Access to Online Communications**

The following pertains to access to and use of online communications:

- Online communication does not decrease or diminish any other ways in which you can communicate with or see Dr. Lewan or any other providers at Northside Family Medicine. It is an additional option for communication, not a replacement. You are encouraged to contact the practice via telephone, mail, or in person, as always, if you have any questions or needs.
- Northside Family Medicine alone will decide which medical topics are appropriate for online communications and to whom with which they will be discussed.
- Northside Family Medicine may stop providing online communications with you or change its policies and services at anytime without prior notification to you.

- NEVER USE EMAIL FOR ANY URGENT MATTERS AS WE MAKE NO GUARANTEES AS TO THE SPEED OF A RESPONSE FROM NORTHSIDE FAMILY MEDICINE. We will try to respond within 2 business days to email.

### **Risks of Using Online Communications**

-All medical communications carry some level of risk. While the likelihood of risks associated with the use of online communications is substantially reduced, the risks are nonetheless real and very important to understand. It is very important that you consider these risks each time you plan to communicate with the practice, and communicate in such a fashion to mitigate the potential for any of these risks. These risks include, but are not limited to:

- Using our website at [www.northsidefammed.com](http://www.northsidefammed.com) as it does not contain a secure way to correspond to our office, but you can correspond via the website and also access helpful information.
- Northside Family Medicine utilizes a SECURE ENCRYPTED Email system. This new system makes it possible to share sensitive medical information via email while protecting your personal privacy and complying with HIPAA privacy rules.
- Northside Family Medicine does not regulate how patients or colleagues choose to SEND information to Northside Family Medicine. However, the way we choose to collect our email from the Internet does protect your personal privacy and complies with HIPAA at this time.
- This does not mean that information can never be stolen in email or online communication even when using SSL encryption security that Northside Family Medicine utilizes.
- Online communication may travel much further than you planned. It is easier for online communications to be forwarded, intercepted, or even changed without your knowledge.
- Online communication is easier to falsify than handwritten or signed hard copies. A dishonest person could attempt to impersonate you to try to get to your medical records.
- It is harder to get rid of an online communication. Backup copies may exist on a computer or in cyberspace, even after both parties (you and the practice) have deleted their copies.
- Online communication is not private simply because it relates to your own medical information. Employers and online services have a right to inspect and keep online communications transmitted through their system.
- Online communications are also admissible as evidence in court.
- Online communications may disrupt or damage your computer if a computer virus is attached.

### **Your options for email communication**

- 1) OPTION #1- The easiest way to correspond to our office is to use your personal email account at your own risk. Northside Family Medicine will not be held responsible for any misdirection or Personal Health Information that may occur while using standard email. Standard email replies from our office will be sent out of our office encrypted but when they go into your email server it will no longer be considered secure, encrypted, or HIPAA compliant. This would just be the same way you currently use your email account.
- 2) OPTION #2- The more secure way to correspond with our office is notify us that you want us to send you information securely. This would mean that you would get an email in your normal email account each time you get an email from our office telling you to use the secure system to access the information we are sending you. You would then have to sign into our secure email system where you will follow the instructions and use the password to access your secure email account. You should only reply to us via your secure email and not your regular email if you want to keep it secure.

By signing the **Online Communications Informed Consent: Patient Acknowledgment and Agreement** (which is on the page where all the signatures are kept for your consent to be seen at Northside Family Medicine) you are agreeing that you have read the above options for email and want to use email and if desired, the [www.northsidefammed.com](http://www.northsidefammed.com) website, understanding all of the risks above. Your signature also indicates that you understand that Northside Family Medicine may use email now to send you reminders about follow up appointments, getting labs or tests done, and sending me copies of labs and tests that I have done. You also agree to notify Northside Family Medicine if your email address changes. Finally, if you no longer wish to receive email from Northside Family Medicine you will notify Northside Family Medicine of your wishes in writing not just ignore emails or turn off option to receive email in our secure messaging system.