

THIS NOTICE DESCRIBES HOW MEDICAL INFORMATION ABOUT YOU MAY BE USED AND DISCLOSED AND HOW YOU CAN GET ACCESS TO THIS INFORMATION. PLEASE REVIEW IT CAREFULLY.

NOTICE OF PRIVACY PRACTICES

Privacy is a very important concern for all those who come to this office. It is also complicated because of federal and state laws and my professional ethical codes. Because the rules are so complicated some parts of this Notice are quite detailed. You probably will have to read them several times to understand them. If you have any questions, I will be happy to help you.

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A. Introduction – To My clients

This notice will tell you about how I handle information about you. It tells how I use this information here in this office, how I share it with other professionals and organizations, and how you can see it. I want you to know all of this so that you can make the best

decisions for yourself and your family. I am also required to tell you about this because of the privacy regulations of a federal law, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA). Because this law and the laws of Connecticut are very complicated and I don't want to make you read a lot that may not apply to you, I have simplified some parts. If you have any questions or want to know more about anything in this Notice, please ask me.

B. What I mean by your medical information

Each time you visit me (or any doctor's office, hospital, clinic, or any other "healthcare provider") information is collected about you and your physical and mental health. It may be information about your past, present, or future physical or mental health or conditions, or the treatment or other services you got from me or from others, or about payments for healthcare. The information I collect from you is called, in the law, PHI, which stands for **Protected Health Information**. This information goes into your **medical or healthcare record**, or file, at the office. In this office this PHI is likely to include these kinds of information:

- Your history. As a child, in school and at work, and marital and personal history.
- Reasons you came for treatment. Your problems, complaints, symptoms, needs, goals.
- Diagnoses. Diagnoses are the medical terms for your problems or symptoms.
- A treatment plan. These are the treatments and other services which I think will best help you.
- Progress notes. Each time you come in I write down some things about how you are doing, what I observe about you, and what you tell me.
- Records I get from others who treated you or evaluated you.
- Psychological test scores, school records, etc.
- Information about medications you took or are taking.
- Legal matters
- Billing and insurance information

This list is just to give you an idea, and there may be other kinds of information that go into your healthcare record here.

I use this information for many purposes. For example, I may use it:

- To plan your care and treatment
- To decide how well my treatments are working for you.
- When I talk with other healthcare professionals who are also treating you
- To show that you actually received the services from me that I billed to you or to your health insurance company.
- For teaching and training other healthcare professionals.
- To improve the way I do my job by measuring the results of my work.

When you understand what is in your record and what it is used for, then you can make better decisions about who, when, and why others should have this information.

Although your health record is my physical property, the information belongs to you. You can inspect, read, or review it. If you want a copy I can make one for you, but may charge you for the costs of copying (and mailing if you want it mailed to you). In some very unusual situations you cannot see all of what is in your records. If you find anything in your records that you think is incorrect, or if you believe something important is missing, you can ask me to amend (add information to) your record, although in some rare situations I don't have to agree to do that.

Notes that I may take during your treatment sessions are called Psychotherapy Notes. **These are not part of your PHI.** These are my personal working notes and are intended to help me recall specific information that I need to treat you. Access to psychotherapy notes may only be granted under special, strict circumstances. Special authorization is required to release information in psychotherapy notes. If you wish to see my psychotherapy notes, or wish to have them disclosed, please discuss this with me.

C. Privacy and the laws

The HIPAA law requires me to keep your PHI private and to give you this notice of my legal duties and my privacy practices. This document is called the **Notice of Privacy Practices** or **NPP**. I will obey the rules of this notice as long as it is in effect. If I change it, the rules of the new NPP will apply to all the PHI I keep. If I change the NPP I will post the new notice in my office where everyone can see it. You or anyone else can also get a copy from me.

D. How your protected health information can be used and shared

When I read your information that is called, in the law, “**use.**” If the information is shared with or sent to others outside this office, that is called, in the law, “**disclosure.**” Generally, when I use your PHI here or disclose it to others, I share only the **minimum necessary** PHI needed for the purpose. The law gives you the rights to know about your PHI, how it is used and to have a say in how it is disclosed, and so I will tell you more about what I do with your information.

I use and disclose PHI for several reasons. Mainly, I will use and disclose (share) it for routine purposes and I will explain more about these below. For other uses I must tell you about them and have a written Authorization from you, unless the law lets or requires me to make the use or disclosure without your authorization. However, the law also says that I am allowed to make some uses and disclosures without your consent or authorization

1. Uses and disclosures of PHI in healthcare *with your consent*

After you have read this Notice you will be asked to sign a separate **Consent form** that allows me to use and to share your PHI. In almost all cases I intend to use your PHI

only here, or share your PHI with other people or organizations that routinely work with me to provide **treatment** to you. I also use your PHI to arrange for **payment** for my services, or some other business functions called health care **operations**. Together these routine purposes are called TPO. The Consent form allows me to use and disclose your PHI for TPO. **Please reread that last sentence until it is clear because it is very important.**

1a. For treatment, payment or healthcare operations.

I need information about you and your condition to provide care to you. You have to agree to let me collect the information, to use it, and to share it as necessary to care for you properly. Therefore you must sign the Consent form before I begin to treat you because if you do not agree and consent, I cannot treat you.

When you come to see me, I may collect information about you and all of it may go into your healthcare records here. Generally, I may use or disclose your PHI for three purposes: treatment, obtaining payment, and what are called healthcare operations. Let's see what these are about.

For treatment

I use your medical information to provide you with psychological treatment or services. These might include individual, family, or group therapy, psychological, educational, or vocational testing, treatment planning, or measuring the effects of my services.

I may share or disclose the minimum necessary PHI to others who provide treatment to you. I am likely to share your information with your personal physician. If you are being treated by a team, I can share some of your PHI with them so that the services you receive will be coordinated. They will also enter their findings, the actions they took, and their plans into your record so we all can decide what treatments work best for you and make up a Treatment Plan. I may refer you to other professionals or consultants for services I cannot offer such as special testing or treatments. When I do this I need to tell them some things about you and your conditions. I will get back their findings and opinions and those will go into your records here. If you receive treatment in the future from other professionals I can also share your PHI with them. These are some examples so that you can see how I use and disclose your PHI for treatment.

For payment

I may use the minimum necessary information to bill you, your insurance, or others to be paid for the treatment I provide to you. I may contact your insurance company to check on exactly what your insurance covers. I may have to tell them about your diagnoses, what treatments you have received, and what I expect as I treat you. I will need to tell them about when we meet, your progress, and other similar things.

For healthcare operations

There are some other ways I may use or disclose your PHI, which are called health care operations. For example, I may use your PHI to see where I can make improvements in the care and services I provide. I may be required to supply some information to some government health agencies so they can study disorders and treatment and make plans for services that are needed. If I do, your name and identity will be removed from what I send.

1b. Other uses in healthcare

Appointment reminders. I may use and disclose medical information to reschedule or remind you of appointments for treatment or other care. If you want me to call or write to you only at your home or your work, or prefer some other way to reach you, I usually can arrange that. Just tell me.

Treatment alternatives. I may use and disclose your PHI to tell you about or recommend possible treatments or alternatives that may be of interest to you.

Other benefits and services. I may use and disclose your PHI to tell you about health-related benefits or services that may be of interest to you.

Research. I may use or share your information to do research to improve treatments. For example, comparing two treatments for the same disorder to see which works better or faster or costs less. In all cases your name, address, and other information that reveals who you are will be removed from the information given to researchers. If they need to know who you are we will discuss the research project with you and you will have to sign a special Authorization form before any information is shared. You may refuse such authorization.

Business associates. There are some jobs I hire other businesses to do for me. They are called my Business Associates in the law. An example is a bookkeeper, who figures out, prints, and mails my bills. These business associates need to receive some of your PHI to do their jobs properly. To protect your privacy they have agreed in their contract with me to safeguard your information.

2. Uses and disclosures *requiring your Authorization*

If I want to use your information for any purpose besides the TPO or those I described above, I need your permission on an **Authorization form**.

If you do authorize me to use or disclose your PHI, you can revoke (cancel) that permission, in writing, at any time. After that time I will not use or disclose your information for the purposes that we agreed to. Of course, I cannot take back any information I had already disclosed with your permission.

3. Uses and disclosures of PHI from mental health records *not requiring* Consent or Authorization

The law lets us use and disclose some of your PHI without your consent or authorization in some cases. I will always try to obtain your authorization whenever possible.

When required by law.

There are some federal, state, or local laws that require me to disclose PHI.

- I have to report suspected child abuse.
- If you are involved in a lawsuit or legal proceeding and I receive a subpoena, discovery request, or other lawful process, I may have to release some of your PHI. I will only do so after trying to tell you about the request, consulting your lawyer, or trying to get a court order to protect the information they requested.
- I have to release (disclose) some information to the government agencies that check on me to see that I am obeying the privacy laws.

For law enforcement purposes

I may release medical information if asked to do so by a properly authorized law enforcement official to investigate a crime or criminal.

For public health activities

I might disclose some of your PHI to agencies that investigate diseases or injuries.

Relating to decedents

I might disclose PHI to coroners, medical examiners, or funeral directors, and to organizations relating to organ, eye, or tissue donations or transplants.

For specific government functions

I may disclose PHI of military personnel and veterans to government benefit programs relating to eligibility and enrollment, to Workers' Compensation programs, to correctional facilities if you are an inmate, and for national security reasons.

To prevent a serious threat to health or safety

If I come to believe that there is a serious threat to your health or safety, or to that of another person or the public, I can disclose some of your PHI. I will only do this to persons who can prevent the danger.

4. Uses and disclosures *requiring that you have an opportunity to object*

If anyone other than yourself is directly participating with you in your care (such as your family or close friends), I can share some information about you with them. I do this only in your presence unless it is an emergency. I will only share information with those involved, or anyone else you choose, such as close friends or clergy. I will ask you about whom you want me to tell and what information about your condition or treatment you want shared. You can tell me what you want and I will honor your wishes as long as it is not against the law. I will ask you to sign an Authorization whenever possible.

If it is an emergency (so I cannot ask if you disagree), I can share information if I believe that it is what you would have wanted, and if I believe it will help you if I do share it. If I do share information in an emergency, I will tell you as soon as I can. If you don't approve I will stop, as long as it is not against the law.

5. An accounting of disclosures

When I disclose your PHI I keep some records of whom I sent it to, when I sent it, and what I sent. You can get an accounting (a list) of many of these disclosures.

E. If you have questions or problems

If you need more information or have questions about the privacy practices described above, please speak to me. If you have a problem with how your PHI has been handled or if you believe your privacy rights have been violated, please tell me right away. You have the right to file a complaint with me and with the Secretary of the Federal Department of Health and Human Services. I promise that I will not take any actions against you if you complain. Together we will discuss the impact your complaint may have on our therapeutic relationship.

The effective date of this notice is April 14, 2003.

