Summary Sheet

Consent and Communicating with Patients

The use of text messaging (SMS) and emails to communicate with patients is becoming more routine in healthcare organisations due to the efficiency and cost benefits offered by these technologies and in response to patient demand.

It is therefore necessary to consider the safe use of electronic forms of communication to prevent patient privacy breaches and to ensure consent has been obtained as required by the Australian Privacy Principles (APP's).

Steps to help protect personal information:

1. Ensure you have a **patient privacy policy** in place and that it is readily available to patients.
2. Implement a **SMS / Email policy** for your practice
3. **Obtain and document patient consent** for receiving information from the practice for each type of message (ie appointment reminders, preventive health reminders, results, health promotion etc)
4. **Confirm the patient's identification and verify** the patient's contact details before any information is sent.
5. **Tailor/limit information sent** in text messages or emails to protect privacy and confidentiality. Ie don't include any sensitive information or test results.
6. **Document all messages**/patient correspondence in the patient medical record.

RACGP Standards and patient follow up

Ensure your practice meets the requirements as set out in the standards for having a single process for the follow up of test results with the patient, especially for those that are clinically significant.

1. **Implement a system for following up patients** who do not respond to recall SMS / Email messages.

2. **Consider the appropriateness of SMS/Email communication** for each type of communication with patients and ensure your practice system works well.

> **GP2.2** ▶ **B** - Our practice recalls patients who have clinically significant results
>
> **GP2.2** ▶ **C** - Our patients are advised of the practice's process for the follow up of tests and results.

For further information:
Avant - Recommendations when using SMS messaging
Avant - Dos and donts of patient SMS communication
AMA - Position statement: Patient follow up, recall and reminder systems

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