

ROCKINGHAM COUNTY
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

NOTICE OF PRIVACY PRACTICES

This notice is effective on Monday, April 14, 2003

**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.**

WE ARE REQUIRED BY LAW TO PROTECT MEDICAL INFORMATION ABOUT YOU

We are required by law to protect the privacy of medical information about you and that identifies you. It may be information about your past, present or future medical condition.

We are also required by law to provide you with this Notice of Privacy Practices explaining our legal duties and privacy practices with respect to medical information. We are legally required to follow the terms of this Notice. In other words, we are only allowed to use and disclose medical information in the manner that we have described in this Notice.

We may change the terms of this Notice in the future. We reserve the right to make changes and to make the new Notice effective for all medical information that we maintain. Except when required by law, a material change to any term of the Notice may not be implemented prior to the effective date of the Notice in which such material change is reflected or put in policies and procedures. If we make changes to the Notice, we will:

- Post the new Notice in our waiting area
- Have copies of the new Notice available upon request (you may always contact our **Privacy Officer at (336) 342-8152** to obtain a copy of the current Notice)

The rest of this Notice will:

- Discuss how we may use and disclose medical information about you
- Explain your rights with respect to medical information about you
- Describe how and where you may file a privacy-related complaint

If, at any time, you have questions about information in this Notice or about our privacy policies, procedures, or practices, you can contact our **Privacy Officer at (336) 342-8152**.

**WE MAY USE AND DISCLOSE MEDICAL
INFORMATION ABOUT YOU IN SEVERAL
CIRCUMSTANCES WITH OR WITHOUT
CONSENT OR AUTHORIZATION**

We use and disclose medical information about clients every day. This section of our Notice explains in some detail how we may use and disclose medical information about you in order to provide health care, obtain payment for that health care, and operate our business efficiently. This section then briefly mentions several other circumstances in which we may use or disclose medical information about you. For more information about any of these uses or disclosures, or about any of our privacy policies, procedures or practices, contact our **Privacy Officer at (336) 342-8152**.

1. Treatment

We may use and disclose medical information about you to provide health care treatment to you. In other words, we may use and disclose medical information about you to provide, coordinate or manage your health care and related services, and manage your health care with others. This may include communicating with other health care providers regarding your treatment and coordinating and managing your health care with others.

Example: Jane is a client at the health department. The receptionist may use medical information about Jane when setting up an appointment. The nurse practitioner will likely use medical information about Jane when reviewing Jane's condition and ordering a blood test. The laboratory technician will likely use medical information about Jane when processing or reviewing her blood test results. If, after reviewing the results of the blood test, the nurse practitioner concludes that Jane should be referred to a specialist, the nurse may disclose medical information about Jane to the specialist to assist the specialist in providing appropriate care to Jane.

2. Payment

We may use and disclose medical information about you to obtain payment for health care services that you receive. This means that, within the health department, we may use medical information about you to arrange for payment (such as preparing bills, and managing accounts). We may also disclose medical information about you to others (such as insurers, collection agencies, and consumer reporting agencies). In some instances, we may disclose medical information about you to an insurance plan before you receive certain health care services because, for example, we may want to know whether the insurance plan will pay for a particular service.

Example: Jane is a client at the health department and she has private insurance. During an appointment with a nurse practitioner, the nurse practitioner ordered a blood test. The health department billing clerk will use medical information about Jane when he prepares a bill for the services provided at the appointment and the blood test. Medical information about Jane will be disclosed to her insurance company when the billing clerk sends in the bill.

Example: The nurse practitioner referred Jane to a specialist. The specialist recommended several complicated and expensive tests. The specialist's billing clerk may contact Jane's insurance company before the specialist runs the tests to determine whether the plan will pay for the test.

3. Health care operations

We may use and disclose medical information about you in performing a variety of business activities that we call "health care operations." These "health care operations" or activities allow us to improve the quality of care we provide and reduce health care costs. For example, we may use or disclose medical information about you in performing the following activities:

- Sending you reminders about an appointment.
- Reviewing and evaluating the skills, qualifications, and performance of health care providers taking care of you
- Providing training programs for students, trainees, health care providers, or non-health care professionals to help them practice or improve their skills.
- Cooperating with outside organizations that evaluate, certify, or license health care providers, staff or facilities.
- Reviewing and improving the quality, efficiency and cost of care that we provide to you and our other clients.
- Improving health care and lowering costs for groups of people who have similar health problems and helping manage and coordinate the care for these groups of people.
- Cooperating with outside organizations that assess the quality of the care that we provide to others, including government agencies and private organizations.
- Planning for our organization's future operations.
- Resolving grievances (complaints) within our organization.
- Reviewing our activities and using or disclosing medical information in the event that control of our organization significantly changes.
- Working with others (such as lawyers, accountants, and other providers) who assist us in complying with this Notice and other applicable laws.
- We may use and/or disclose medical information about you to inform you of or recommend new treatment or different methods for treating a medical condition that you have, or to inform you of other health related benefits and services that may be of interest to you.

Example: Jane was diagnosed with diabetes. The health department used Jane's medical information -- as well as medical information from all of the other health department clients diagnosed with diabetes -- to develop an educational program to help clients recognize the early symptoms of diabetes. (Note: The educational program would not identify any specific clients without their permission).

Example: Jane is a client at the health department and she has been diagnosed with diabetes. The health department developed an educational program to help diabetes clients manage their diets. The health department sends Jane a flyer with information about the program.

Example: Jane complained that she did not receive appropriate health care. The health department reviewed Jane's record to evaluate the quality of the care provided Jane. The health department also discussed Jane's care with an attorney.

4. Persons involved in your care

We may disclose medical information about you to a relative, close personal friend, or any other person you identify if that person is involved in your care and the information is relevant to your care. If the client is a minor, we may disclose medical information about the minor to a parent, guardian or other person responsible for the minor except in limited circumstances. For more information on the privacy of minors' information, contact our **Privacy Officer at (336) 342-8152**.

We may also use or disclose medical information about you to a relative, another person involved in your care, or possibly a disaster relief organization (such as the American Red Cross) if we need to notify someone about your location or condition.

You may ask us at any time not to disclose medical information about you to persons involved in your care. We will agree to your request and not disclose the information except in certain limited circumstances (such as emergencies) or if the client is a minor. If the client is a minor, we may or may not agree with your request.

Example: Jane's husband regularly comes to the health department with Jane for her appointments and he helps with her medication. When the nurse practitioner is discussing a new medication with Jane, Jane invites her husband to come into the private room. The nurse practitioner discusses the new medication with Jane and Jane's husband.

5. Required or permitted to disclose by law

We will use and disclose medical information about you whenever we are required by law to do so. There are many state and federal laws that require us to use and disclose medical information. For example, state law requires us to report gunshot wounds and certain other injuries to the police and to report known or suspected child abuse or neglect to the Department of Social Services. We will comply with those state laws and with all other applicable laws. We may also disclose medical information about you to others as permitted by law. For example we may disclose medical information to the county data processing department when data processing staff work on Health Department computers.

We may deny your request in certain circumstances. If we deny your request, we will explain our reason for doing so in writing. We will also inform you in writing if you have the right to have our decision reviewed by another person.

If you would like a copy of the information, we may charge you a reasonable fee to cover the costs of the copies.

We may be able to provide you with a summary or explanation of the information. Contact our Privacy Officer for more information on these services and any possible additional fees.

3. Right to have medical information amended

You have the right to have us amend (which means correct or supplement) medical information about you that we maintain in certain groups of records. If you believe that we have information that is either inaccurate or incomplete, we may amend the information to indicate the problem and notify others who have copies of the inaccurate or incomplete information. If you would like us to amend information, you must provide us with a request in writing. You may write us a letter requesting an amendment or fill out an Amendment Request Form. Amendment Request Forms are available from our Privacy Officer.

We may deny your request in certain circumstances. If we deny your request, we will explain our reason for doing so in writing. You will have the opportunity to send us a statement explaining why you disagree with our decision to deny your amendment request, and we will share your statement whenever we disclose the information in the future.

4. Right to an accounting of disclosures we have made

You have the right to receive an accounting (which means a detailed listing) of disclosures of your medical information that we have made for the previous six years. If you would like to receive an accounting, you may send us a letter requesting an accounting, fill out an Accounting Request Form, or contact our Privacy Officer. Accounting Request Forms are available from our Privacy Officer.

The accounting will not include several types of disclosures, including disclosures for treatment, payment, or health care operations. Nor will it include disclosures made prior to April 14, 2003.

If you request an accounting more than once every twelve (12) months, we may charge you a fee to cover the costs of preparing the accounting.

5. Right to request restrictions on uses and disclosures

You have the right to request that we limit the use and disclosure of medical information about you. We are not required to agree with your request.

If we agree to your request, we must follow your restrictions (except if the information is necessary for emergency treatment). You may cancel the restriction at any time in writing, or by verbally agreeing to the cancellation with Rockingham County Department of Public Health documenting your verbal agreement. In addition, we may cancel a restriction at any time as long as we notify you of the cancellation and continue to apply the restriction to information collected before the date of cancellation.

6. Right to request an alternative method of contact

You have the right to request to be contacted at a different location or by a different method. For example, you may prefer to have all written information mailed to your work address rather than to your home address.

We will agree to any reasonable request for alternative methods of contact. If you would like to request an alternative method of contact, you must provide us with a request in writing. You may write us a letter or fill out an Alternative Contact Request Form. Alternative Contact Request Forms are available from our Privacy Officer.

If you believe that your privacy rights have been violated, or if you are dissatisfied with our privacy policies or procedures, you may file a complaint with us and/or with the federal government. **We will not take any action against you or change our treatment of you in any way if you file a complaint.**

**YOU MAY FILE A COMPLAINT
ABOUT OUR PRIVACY
PRACTICES**

To file a written complaint with the health department, you may bring your complaint to the department or you may mail it to the following address:

**Rockingham County Department of Public Health
PO Box 204
Wentworth, NC 27375-0204
Attn.: Privacy Officer**

To file a complaint with the federal government, you may send your written complaint naming the Agency that is the subject of the complaint, and a description of the acts or omissions that you believe have occurred, within 180 days of your becoming aware of the occurrence to the:
Secretary, Health and Human Services

The Rockingham County Department of Public Health Privacy Officer can provide you with the full address.

6. National priority uses and disclosures

When permitted by law, we may use or disclose medical information about you, without your permission, for various activities that are recognized as "national priorities." The government has determined that under certain circumstances (described below), it is so important to disclose medical information that it is acceptable to disclose medical information without the individual's permission. We will only disclose medical information about you in the following circumstances when we are permitted to do so by law. Below are brief descriptions of the "national priority" activities recognized by law. For more information on these types of disclosures, contact our **Privacy Officer at (336) 342-8152**.

- **Threat to health or safety:** We may use or disclose medical information about you if we believe it is necessary to prevent or lessen a serious threat to health or safety.
- **Public health activities:** We may use or disclose medical information about you for public health activities. Public health activities require the use of medical information for various activities including, but not limited to, activities related to investigating diseases, reporting child abuse and neglect, monitoring drugs or devices regulated by the Food and Drug Administration, and monitoring work-related illnesses or injuries. For example, if you have been exposed to a communicable disease (such as a sexually transmitted disease) we may report it to the State and take other actions to prevent the spread of the disease.
- **Abuse, neglect, or domestic violence:** We may disclose medical information about you to a government authority (such as Department of Social Services) if you are an adult and we reasonably believe that you may be a victim of abuse, neglect or domestic violence.
- **Health oversight activities:** We may disclose medical information about you to a health oversight agency - which is basically an agency responsible for overseeing the health care system or certain government programs. For example, a government agency may request information from us while they are investigating possible insurance fraud.
- **Court proceedings:** We may disclose medical information about you to a court or an officer of the court (such as an attorney). For example, we will disclose medical information about you to a court if a judge orders us to do so.
- **Law enforcement:** We may disclose medical information about you to a law enforcement official for specific law enforcement purposes. For example, we may disclose limited medical information about you to a police officer if the officer needs the information to help find or identify a missing person.
- **Coroners and others:** We may disclose medical information about you to a coroner, medical examiner, or a funeral director or to organizations that help with organ, eye, and tissue transplants.
- **Worker's Compensation:** We may disclose medical information about you to comply with worker's compensation laws.
- **Research organizations:** We may use or disclose medical information about you to research organizations, if the organization has satisfied certain conditions about protecting the privacy of medical information.
- **Certain government functions:** We may use and disclose medical information about you for certain government functions, including, but not limited to, military and veterans' activities and national security and intelligence activities. We may also use or disclose medical information about you to a correctional institution in some circumstances.

7. Authorization:

Other than the uses and disclosures described above (#1 -- 6), we will not use or disclose medical information about you without the "authorization" -- or signed permission -- of you or your personal representative. In some instances, we may wish to use or disclose medical information about you and we may contact you to ask you to sign an authorization form. In other instances, you may contact us to ask us to disclose medical information and we will ask you to sign an authorization form.

If you sign a written authorization allowing us to disclose medical information about you, you may later revoke (or cancel) your authorization in writing (except in very limited circumstances related to obtaining insurance coverage). If you would like to revoke your authorization, you may write us a letter revoking your authorization or fill out an Authorization Revocation Form. Authorization Revocation Forms are available from our Privacy Officer. If you revoke your authorization, we will follow your instructions except to the extent that we have already relied upon your authorization and taken some action.

YOU HAVE RIGHTS WITH RESPECT TO MEDICAL INFORMATION ABOUT YOU

You have several rights with respect to medical information about you. This section of the Notice will briefly mention each of these rights. If you would like to know more about your rights, please contact our **Privacy Officer at (336) 342-8152**.

1. Right to a copy of this Notice

You have a right to have a paper copy of our Notice of Privacy Practices at any time. In addition, a copy of the most recent version of this Notice will always be posted in our waiting area. If you would like to have a copy of our Notice, ask the receptionist for a copy or contact our Privacy Officer.

2. Right of access to inspect and copy

You have the right to inspect (which means see or review) and receive a copy of medical information about you that we maintain in certain groups of records. If you would like to inspect or receive a copy of medical information about you, you must provide us with a request in writing. You may write us a letter requesting access or fill out an Access Request Form. Access Request Forms are available from our Privacy Officer.