Patient Email Communications
Question & Answer Fact Sheet

The following questions and answers are guidelines for utilizing email as a method of communication with your healthcare provider.

What are my risks when using email?
- Email transmission is not guaranteed to be secure or confidential; unauthorized individuals may be able to intercept, read and possibly modify e-mail you send or are sent by Saskatoon Health Region (SHR).
- Email may inadvertently be sent to wrong destinations or to the wrong individual.
- Employers may monitor email sent or received by employer-owned systems.
- Email can be used to spread viruses, some of which may cause unauthorized email distribution.
- Email can forwarded without the authorization or detection of the source author.
- Shared family email accounts can jeopardize confidentiality.

When is it okay for me to use email?
Email should only be used for non-urgent issues such as routine enquiries or appointment information. **Never** use email for communication of serious, urgent or time-critical medical issues like suffering from chest pain or severe low blood sugar levels. We do not advise using email when discussing sensitive information such as sexually transmitted diseases, mental health problems, drug treatment or alcohol-related disorders.

How should I format an email?
- Type "CONFIDENTIAL" and the reason for the communication in the Subject line.
  Example: "Subject: CONFIDENTIAL – Medical Question"
- State your message simply and include the following:
  - your full name
  - telephone number (where we can reach you)

How soon will I hear back from my provider?
SHR health care providers will do their best to respond to email communications in a timely manner. If you don't hear back within a few days, please phone your SHR health care provider.

How will the information in my emails be used?
The information within your email may be shared with other SHR health care providers as part of your care team. SHR will not, however, share emails with third parties not involved with your care without your prior written consent, except as authorized or required by The Health Information Protection Act (HIPA). Please keep in mind that all emails, sent or received, may become part of your health record.

What should I do if I change my email address?
You must notify your SHR health care provider as soon as possible to maintain confidentiality.

Also...
Instead of creating a new email, be sure to click REPLY when responding to an SHR email. This establishes an email trail that allows you and your SHR health care provider to track messages, as well as eliminates the need for entering the return email address, therefore reducing chances of entering an address incorrectly. For your own records, you may want to save copies of messages sent and received within your email program.

**If you have any questions or concerns, please contact your SHR health care provider**
Patient Email Communications Consent Form

Patient Name_______________________________________ HSN_____________________________________

Email address(es)_____________________________________________________________________________

Home phone________________________________________ Work phone____________________________________

________________________________________

* I, __________________________, request and authorize _______________________________________, (department name), Saskatoon Health Region to communicate information with me regarding aspects of my healthcare through the above email address(es). My signature below denotes that I have read the document, Patient Email Communications -- Question and Answer Fact Sheet, and accept the risk of loss of privacy of confidential health information associated with email communication.

I agree that SHR shall not be liable for any type of damage or liability arising from or associated with the loss of confidentiality due to email communication that is not caused by the health care provider's intentional misconduct. I understand SHR will use reasonable means to protect the security and confidentiality of email information sent and received. However, because of the risks outlined in the Question and Answer Fact Sheet, SHR cannot guarantee the security and confidentiality of email communication. Further, I understand that SHR does not guarantee this means of communication will be free from technological difficulties including, but not limited to, loss of messages and delay of transmission.

This authorization for communication by means of email is valid until I notify the department listed above, in writing, that I no longer authorize the use of email to communicate information concerning my healthcare. I understand that information communicated by email may be retained within my health record. SHR also retains the right to terminate email as a communication option if it becomes burdensome or is used inappropriately.

Signature of Patient/Substitute Decision Maker: _____________________________________________________

Date: _______________________________________________________________________________________

* Retain copy in patient's health record