

# **Trent C. Holmberg, M.D.**

## **Patient-Provider Email Agreement**

The use of email for patients to communicate with this office is available as a convenience. Although there are risks involved, we believe that the ease of email communication can be a benefit to patient care within certain limitations. If you choose to email this office, please make sure you are familiar with the policies and guidelines outlined below to help maintain your privacy and enhance communication. Your decision to use email to communicate is strictly voluntary and your consent may be rescinded at any time.

### **Policies and Guidelines for Using Email with Dr. Holmberg's Office**

#### **When may I use email to communicate with Dr. Holmberg?**

- Appointments
- Medication refill requests or questions
- Billing questions
- General questions about your care that do not require an immediate response.

#### **When should I NOT use email to communicate with Dr. Holmberg? Please call instead!**

- In an emergency
- If you are experiencing any desire to harm yourself or others
- If you are experiencing a severe medication reaction
- If you need an immediate response
- To communicate personal or confidential information (for doctor's ears only).
- If you do not want the contents of your email to be a part of your permanent medical record.

#### **What happens to the emails I send and who has access to them?**

- The email account we use to communicate with patients is a general office email (NOT Dr. Holmberg's personal email) and is accessed by both Dr. Holmberg and his office staff. If you are needing to communicate confidential information to Dr. Holmberg only, please do not send it via email. Instead wait until your next appointment.
- Emails may be printed out and become part of your permanent paper or electronic health record.
- As part of your permanent health record, emails will be released along with the rest of the medical records if requested (and authorized) or when the doctor is legally required to do so.
- Even if Dr. Holmberg is the only one that reads your email, it may be seen by staff for the purpose of filing it in the chart or carrying out requests (e.g., appointment scheduling).

#### **When will my email be read, by whom, and when should I expect a response?**

- Patient emails are checked by either Dr. Holmberg or his staff on weekdays, during business hours.
- Patient emails are not read on weekends or after business hours.
- Response time varies but it is generally within 24-48 hours except on weekends. If an email is sent on a weekend or on a day that Dr. Holmberg and his staff are not in the office, or on vacation, the response time may be longer. If your email has not been answered within a reasonable amount of time, please send the email again or call the office.

#### **What are the advantages to using email?**

- Unlike voicemails, email allows you to see the question the doctor's office is responding to and to have a written record of that exchange for future reference.
- Email allows for the rapid transmission of forms or other paperwork such as information regarding your medications/condition.
- Emails are a convenient way of communication if you don't need an answer right away.
- Unlike phone calls, emails can be read privately without others overhearing.

**Risks of using email include, but are not limited to:**

- Email may be seen by unintended viewers if addressed incorrectly.
- Email may be intercepted by hackers and redistributed or copied.
- Someone posing as you could access your information.
- Email can be used to spread computer viruses.
- Emails may not be received by either party if sent to junk/spam folders or if accidentally deleted.
- Emails are discoverable in litigation and may be used as evidence in court.
- Emails can be circulated and stored by unintended recipients.
- Emails may be misunderstood or interpreted wrong thus negatively affecting treatment.
- There may be an unanticipated time delay between messages being sent and received.

**What are my obligations?**

- I must let Dr. Holmberg's office know immediately if my email address changes.
- If I do not receive a response from Dr. Holmberg's office within 24-48 hours on weekdays, I will call the office if a response is needed.
- I will use email communication only for the allowed purposes stated above.
- I will advise Dr. Holmberg's office in writing should I decide that I would prefer not to continue communicating via email as well as receive informational or reminder emails.
- I understand that email may only be used to supplement my appointments and not as a substitute for them.
- To avoid confusion, I will not use slang or abbreviations in my emails.
- I agree to not use any foul, inappropriate, or offensive language.

**What steps has Dr. Holmberg and his staff taken to protect the privacy of my email communications?****Dr. Holmberg's Office:**

- Has purchased a secure business email account and has signed a BAA (business associate agreement with that email service).
- Has the capability of encrypting email messages. However, encryption requires the recipient to have a password to open an email. Therefore, for ease of use, encryption will only be used when sending medical records. General email communication is not encrypted and is instead sent with a warning message at the bottom of each email indicating the risks the patient accepts when using email.
- Has purchased a patient portal program that can be used to communicate if encryption is a concern.
- Has password protected screensavers on each office computer.
- Has educated staff on the appropriate use and protection of email along with HIPAA rules and regulations.
- Does not access patient email from public Wi-Fi hotspots.
- Will not transmit highly sensitive information via email unless authorized by the patient.
- Will not forward patient emails to third parties without the patient's consent unless it is part of the medical record and legally required.
- Will verify email addresses and any attachments before sending email messages.

**What steps can I take to protect my privacy?**

- Do not use your work computer or work email account to communicate with Dr. Holmberg's office as your employer has a right to inspect emails sent through the company's system.
- Do not use a shared email account to transmit messages.
- Log out of your email account if you will be away from your computer.
- Carefully check the address before hitting "send" to ensure that you are sending your message to the intended receiver.
- Avoid writing or reading emails on a mobile device in a public place.
- Avoid accessing email on a public Wi-Fi hotspot.
- Make certain that your email is signed with your first and last name. Include your phone number and date of birth to avoid possible mix up with patients with same or similar names.

**Additional Policies:**

- Personal or confidential issues (for Dr. Holmberg's ears only) should be addressed during your appointment as emails may be read by the office staff before it is directed to Dr. Holmberg.
- If the use of email is abused or if we receive any offensive or inappropriate emails, we reserve the right to block the email address it came from as well as take other actions, including legal, if necessary.
- Appointment reminders, questions, and practice changes or policies will often be emailed if we cannot reach you by phone. If you do not wish to have any information sent to you by email, please contact us immediately.
- Your use of email to communicate with this office (regardless of signing this agreement) automatically indicates that you acknowledge and accept the possible risks associated with such communication.
- By emailing this office you are also agreeing to not hold Dr. Holmberg or his office staff liable if an email is accidentally misdirected or intercepted due to human error or by cybercriminals.

**Please sign below indicating that you understand the risks associated with email communication.**

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**Patient or Legal Representative Signature**

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**Date**