



Email and SMS – For patients

Emails are not our preferred method of communication

Our patients will be given the option of being contacted by SMS for appointment reminders and health messages.

All new patients, when completing the new patient questionnaire online, are asked to provide consent to agree or disagree to be communicated with in this manner. Existing patients, where no signed consent, will be asked verbally and update Comms consent in Best Practice. Advise patient they can read the electronic communication policy on GFMC's website.

It is acknowledged by the practice that consent is implied if the patient initiates electronic communication with the practice.

Reception staff check each patient has this information on their record on arrival to the practice, along with the verification of their name, date of birth and address.

The signed consent, which forms part of the new patient questionnaire, will be scanned and recorded in the patient electronic record and their response recorded in Comms consent on the practice software.

The consent form will state that the practice may use this mode of communication:

- to send reminders for a scheduled appointment.
- when the patient needs to make an appointment to review a test result.
- as a reminder "Health Message" that a generic preventative screening test (for example, flu vaccine, skin-check, cervical screening) is due.
- Health Awareness (leaflets or database search)

Further information will state that the practice:

- cannot guarantee confidentiality of information transferred via email.
- will comply with the Australian Privacy Principles and the Privacy Act 1988.
- communications will not contain sensitive information, due to the risk of confidential information being accessed inadvertently or intentionally by a third party.
- communications will not contain results that only the general practitioner should be divulging in a follow-up appointment, ie abnormal results, education concerning a new diagnosis, etc
- communication will not entail promotion of any product and/or preventative health care (as some patients can interpret this as an advertisement)

Patients will be advised through the consent form that:

- Patients are advised that emails are not our preferred method of communication.
- emails will be acknowledged within 48 hours and is included in the automatic email response.
- patients should not use email to contact the practice in an emergency and is included in the automatic email response.

Our practice email account for patients and stakeholders for non-urgent communication with our practice is mariac@gfmc.com.au

This email account will be routinely checked throughout the business day by the delegated authority, Maria Clark, Practice Manager:

- at the start of business
- midday
- one hour before end of business

The email message will then be forwarded to the appropriate team member for response. Communication conducted with a patient via electronic means will be added to the patient's medical record by the team member resolving the enquiry.

When recalling a patient for a test result, the extent to which patients are followed up will depend on the level of urgency and the clinical significance of their test results. If the patient has not responded to the SMS or email in one week then other forms of communication (phone call, registered mail) may be considered.

Email and SMS between the practice and the patient will form part of the medical record and need to be included, as must any actions taken in response to the message.