

Communications via fax

The Dental Council's Code of Practice: *Professional Behaviour and Ethical Conduct* ("the Code of Practice") available on the Dental Council website, provides at paragraph 10 that "All dental healthcare workers and staff within your dental practice must respect patient confidentiality". The Code of Practice provides clear guidelines in relation to maintaining patient confidentiality, (including after a patient has died), and this should always be observed when communicating with patients. A dentist should protect a patient's privacy and ensure that patient information in their control is protected against improper disclosure, access, or loss.

Fax Messages

The transmission of personal health information to a patient by fax should be avoided where possible. Dentists should use encrypted emails where possible.

In circumstances where dental/clinical information is required urgently, and a more secure means of communication is unavailable the following should be taken into consideration when communicating by fax:

1. Ensure that the patient information is being sent to the correct fax number. If an auto-dial function is being used, check that the number has not been changed.
2. The recipient should be notified in advance by telephone that the fax will arrive shortly. You should take the opportunity to again confirm the fax number with the recipient.
3. Request that the recipient confirms by telephone that the faxed document has been received.
4. Fax machines which are used to transmit and receive confidential patient information should be kept in a secure area and not accessible to the general public.
5. Make sure a fax cover sheet is included which clearly identifies the sender and the intended recipient.
6. The fax cover sheet should indicate that the information contained therein is strictly private and confidential and to be viewed by the addressee only.
7. Confirm the correct number of pages were sent and received.
8. Check the confirmation sheet to ensure there were no errors.
9. Keep the fax confirmation sheet together with the faxed material on the patient's file.

Sample confidentiality notice

A fax cover sheet which clearly identifies the sender and the intended recipient should be used. The fax cover sheet should also indicate that the information is confidential.

Possible wording for a fax cover sheet is as follows:

CONFIDENTIALITY NOTICE:

The information contained in this facsimile message is privileged and confidential information intended for the use of the individual or entity named above. If you have received this facsimile message in error, please contact us immediately and then destroy the faxed material.

Please do not hesitate to contact Medisec if you have any specific queries regarding fax messages.

"The contents of this publication are indicative of current developments and contain guidance on general dento-legal queries. It does not constitute and should not be relied upon as definitive legal, clinical or other advice and if you have any specific queries, please contact Medisec for advice".