

NOTICE OF PRIVACY PRACTICES

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.

Our goal is to take appropriate steps to attempt to safeguard any medical or other personal information that is provided to us. The Privacy Rule under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) requires us to: (i) maintain the privacy of medical information provided to us; (ii) provide a notice of our legal duties and privacy practices; and (iii) abide by the terms of our Notice of Privacy Practices currently in effect.

INFORMATION COLLECTED ABOUT YOU

In the ordinary course of receiving treatment and health care services from us, you will be providing us with personal information such as:

- Your name, address, and phone number;
- Information relating to your medical history;
- Your insurance information and coverage;
- Information concerning your doctor, nurse or other medical providers.

In addition, we will gather certain medical information about you and will create a record of the care provided to you. Some information also may be provided to us by other individuals or organizations that are part of your “circle of care” such as the referring physician, your other doctors, your health plan, and close friends or family members.

We may use and disclose personal and identifiable health information about you for a variety of purposes. All of the types of uses and disclosures of information are described below, but not every use or disclosure in a category is listed.

REQUIRED DISCLOSURES:

We are required to disclose health information about you to the Secretary of Health and Human Services, upon request, to determine our compliance with HIPAA and to you, in accordance with your right to access and right to receive an accounting of disclosures, as described below.

FOR TREATMENT:

We may use health information about you in your treatment. For example, we may use your medical history, such as any presence or absence of diabetes, to assess the health of your eyes.

FOR PAYMENT:

We may use and disclose health information about you to bill for our services and to collect payment from you or your insurance company. For example, we may need to give a payer information about your current medical condition so that it will pay us for the eye examination or other services that we have furnished you. We may also need to inform your payer of the treatment you are going to receive in order to obtain prior approval or to determine whether the service is covered.

FOR HEALTH CARE OPERATIONS:

We may use and disclose information about you for the general operation of our business. For example, we sometimes arrange for auditors or other consultants to review our practices, evaluate our operations,

and tell us how to improve our services. Or, for example, we may use and disclose your health information to review the quality of services provided to you.

PUBLIC POLICY USES AND DISCLOSURES:

There are a number of public policy reasons why we may disclose information about you, which are described below.

We may disclose protected health information (PHI) about you when we are required to do so by federal, state, or local law.

We may disclose protected health information about you in connection with certain public health reporting activities. For instance, we may disclose such information to a public health authority authorized to collect or receive PHI for the purpose of preventing or controlling disease, injury or disability, or at the direction of a public health authority, to an official of a foreign government agency that is acting in collaboration with a public health authority. Public health authorities include state health departments, the Center for Disease Control, the Food and Drug Administration, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the Environmental Protection Agency, to name a few.

We are also permitted to disclose PHI to a public health authority or other governmental authority authorized by law to receive reports of child abuse or neglect. Additionally we may disclose PHI to a person subject to the Food and Drug Administration's power for the following activities: to report adverse events, product defects or problems, or biological product deviations; to track products; to enable product recalls, repairs or replacements; or to conduct post-marketing surveillance. We may also disclose a patient's health information to a person who may have been exposed to a communicable disease, or to an employer to conduct an evaluation relating to medical surveillance of the workplace, or to evaluate whether an individual has a work-related illness or injury.

We may disclose health information about you in connection with certain health oversight activities of licensing and other health oversight agencies which are authorized by law. Health oversight activities include audit, investigation, inspection, licensure or disciplinary actions, and civil, criminal, or administrative proceedings or actions or any other activity necessary for the oversight of: 1) the health care system; 2) governmental benefit programs for which health information is relevant to determining beneficiary eligibility; 3) entities subject to governmental regulatory programs for which health information is necessary for determining compliance with program standards; or 4) entities subject to civil rights laws for which health information is necessary for determining compliance.

We may release a patient's health information (1) to a coroner or medical examiner to identify a deceased person or determine the cause of death and (2) to funeral directors. We also may release your health information to organ procurement organizations, transplant centers, and eye or tissue banks, if you are an organ donor.

We may release your health information to workers' compensation or similar programs, which provide benefits for work-related injuries or illnesses without regard to fault.

Health information about you also may be disclosed when necessary to prevent a serious threat to your health and safety or the health and safety of others.

We may use or disclose certain health information about your condition and treatment for research purposes where an Institution Review Board or a similar body referred to as a Privacy Board determines that your privacy interests will be adequately protected in the study. We may also use and disclosed your health information to prepare or analyze a research protocol and for other research purposes.

If you are a member of the Armed Forces we may release health information about you for activities deemed necessary by military command authorities. We also may release health information about foreign military personnel to their appropriate foreign military authority.

We may disclose your protected health information for legal or administrative proceedings that involve you. We may release such information upon order of a court or administrative tribunal. We may also release protected health information in the absence of such an order and in response to a discovery or other lawful request, if efforts have been made to notify you or secure a protective order.

If you are an inmate, we may release protected health information about you to a correctional institution where you are incarcerated or to law enforcement officials in certain situations such as where the information is necessary for your treatment, health or safety, or the health or safety of others.

Finally, we may disclose protected health information for national security and intelligence activities and for the provision of protective services to the President of the United States and other officials or foreign heads of state.

OUR BUSINESS ASSOCIATES:

We sometimes work with outside individuals and businesses that help us operate our business successfully. We may disclose your health information to these business associates so that they can perform the tasks that we hire them to do. Our business associates must promise that they will respect the confidentiality of your personal and identifiable health information.

DISCLOSURE TO PERSONS ASSISTING IN YOUR CARE OR PAYMENT FOR YOUR CARE:

We may disclose information to individuals involved in your care or in the payment for your care. This includes people and organizations that are part of your “circle of care”—such as your spouse, your other doctors, or and aide who may be providing services to you. We may also use and disclose health information about a patient for disaster relief efforts and to notify persons responsible for a patient’s care about a patient’s location, general condition or death. Generally, we will obtain your verbal agreement before using or disclosing health information in this way. However, under certain circumstances, such as in an emergency situation, we may make these uses and disclosures without your agreement.

APPOINTMENT REMINDERS:

We may use and disclose medical information to contact you as a reminder that you have an appointment or that you should schedule an appointment.

Treatment Alternatives: We may use and disclose personal health information in order to tell you about or recommend possible treatment options, alternatives or health-related services that may be of interest to you.

OTHER USES AND DISCLOSURES OF PERSONAL INFORMATION:

We are required to obtain written authorization from you for any other uses and disclosures for medical information other than those described above. If you provide us with such permission, you may revoke that permission, in writing, at any time. If you revoke your permission, we will no longer use or disclose personal information about you for the reasons covered by your written authorization, except to the extent we have already relied on your original permission.

INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS

You have the right to ask for restrictions on the ways we use and disclose your health information for treatment, payment and health care operation purposes. You may also request that we limit our disclosures to persons assisting your care or payment for your care. We will consider your request, but we are not required to accept it.