

**Pondera Medical Center  
Administrative Policy/Procedure**

**Policy Number: 84.01.2010.OP.08**

**TITLE:** Communications and Communications Systems

**AREAS AFFECTED:** All Areas

**PURPOSE:** This Policy defines Pondera Medical Center's accepted procedures and protocols for communication with other medical facilities that are part of our network, when such communication is necessary to share medical information concerning the status of any patient.

It is not the intent of this Policy to define communication protocols for the routine sharing of information between medical facilities (even though such communication may contain patient medical information) when the purpose of such routine sharing is for purposes other than direct patient care (e.g., Quality Assessment purposes).

**DEFINITIONS:** In the regular operation of a medical facility, it is sometimes necessary to share medical information concerning patient care between Pondera Medical Center and other medical facilities. The information being shared, however, must be treated as confidential patient information. Examples of the need to share confidential patient information with other medical facilities includes, but is not limited to, the forwarding of medical records when a patient might be transferred to another medical facility, the receipt of information in the form of laboratory results, the exchange of communication between practitioners involved in the ongoing care of a patient or the receipt of information from emergency medical responders in the field.

Sharing confidential patient information should be done via secure communication channels. Communication channels which are considered "secure" include telephone and facsimile (fax) over normal telephone lines, encrypted electronic communication through the internet (secure e-mail) and cellular telephone\*. Communication channels that are considered unsecure include various forms of radio such as citizens band, amateur, police or fire band.

In order to safeguard patient confidentiality, and at the same time ensure the availability of timely and reliable communication, several methods are recognized as appropriate for use by Pondera Medical Center:

- 1) Telephone
- 2) Fax
- 3) Cellular telephone

\*Cellular Telephone transmissions are not immune to interception by persons with appropriately equipped scanners. Such interception is, however, prohibited by federal law.

Regular radio, which is open to interception by multiple individuals with common scanners, should not be used to communicate confidential information.

Pondera Medical Center does NOT approve the movement of patient information through unsecure Internet sites.

## **PROCEDURE:**

### **Communication Between Emergency Room Personnel and Emergency Responders in the Field:**

All communication between Emergency Room personnel at Pondera Medical Center and emergency responders in the field should be carried out via radio or cellular telephone as allowed by practiced communication standards.

**Patient Safety and Emergency Communication:** Nothing in this policy is intended to prohibit, inhibit, or otherwise impede the transfer of emergency communications, when such communications and the content thereof are necessary to protect the safety, or save the life, of the patient. As an example, if vital medical information concerning a person experiencing a medical emergency in the field can only be relayed via citizens band radio or cellular telephone that mode of communication is acceptable until a more secure method of communication can be established.

**Communication Between Practitioners in Pondera Medical Center and Practitioners in Another Medical Facility:** All communication between caregivers at Pondera Medical Center (including physicians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, nurses and other ancillary caregivers) and caregivers in other medical facilities should be via regular telephone.

Do not fax confidential patient information except in emergencies. Routine transmittal of confidential patient information should be done by mail or hand delivery. If sharing emergency written information is required, Pondera Medical Center personnel should fax information only to fax machines located in an appropriate location in the receiving facility. Appropriate locations are defined as areas where the confidentiality of the information will be protected, and at the same time the information is available to the appropriate medical personnel. Examples of appropriate locations are fax machines located in medical record departments, emergency rooms, or nurses' stations. Examples of inappropriate locations are fax machines located in administrative offices, purchasing departments, or other non-patient care areas.

### **Communication Between Outside Medical Service Agencies and Pondera Medical Center:**

Communication between outside medical service agencies and Pondera Medical Center should be via regular telephone or fax. Examples of this kind of communication would include laboratory results returned to Pondera Medical Center from a reference laboratory, radiological or other specialty test interpretations.

### **Determination of the Security of a Fax Machine in Another Facility:**

Employees of Pondera Medical Center that have a need to fax confidential medical information to another medical facility should ensure that the receiving fax machine is one that is located where the medical personnel of the receiving medical facility are in a position to appropriately handle the received material. For instance, in a patient transfer from emergency room to emergency room, it would be appropriate to fax patient information to the receiving emergency room, but not to the medical records department.

Personnel responsible for sending such information should take the following precautions:

- 1) If possible, send information only to a fax number that is published on the Commonly Called Fax Numbers list. A list of Commonly Called Faxed Numbers is made available for all fax machines in Pondera Medical Center. This list is maintained by the Medical Records Department and updated as appropriate. Always verify the recipient's fax number when information is being sent. An attempt should be made to notify the recipient before faxing

the confidential information to ensure that someone is there to receive, file or deliver it. Do not fax confidential patient information if no one is there.

- 2) If an appropriate fax number is not known, inquire with the receiving location the number of an appropriate and secure fax machine.
- 3) In all cases, fill out and use an appropriate fax cover sheet with the transmission. Indicate what was faxed along with the patient's last name.
- 4) Mark each sheet of the faxed document with the RED COPY STAMP.
- 5) Always check the fax number indicated on the machine as that which is intended to dial. If there has been an error, contact the incorrect recipient immediately and request destruction of any information that was faxed in error notify the HIPAA Compliance Officer.

**Receiving Confidential Medical Information:** Pondera Medical Center personnel may, from time to time, be responsible for the receipt of confidential medical information. The following guidelines should be followed:

- 1) Personnel who may be requesting another medical facility to send confidential medical information should be careful to direct the other medical facility to use only approved channels of communication. This includes directing the other medical facility to send information only to an appropriate and secure fax machine.
- 2) When necessary, personnel should remind others that they should use secure channels of communication. For example, if any emergency responder attempts to pass medical information that is not necessary to protect the safety, or save the life, of the patient via citizens band radio, remind the emergency responders that they should use a secure channel of communication as identified above.

**Date of Origin:** 06/00

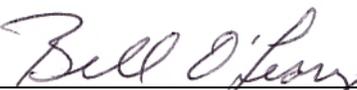
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**References:** Tag Number: C193

**Contact Person(s):** Chief Nursing Officer, Chief Executive Officer

**Executive Approval:** 

**Date of Board of Director's Review:** 06/23/11