

NOTICE OF PRIVACY PRACTICES

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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.

We understand the importance of privacy and are committed to maintaining the confidentiality of your medical information. We make a record for the medical care we provide and may receive such records from others. We use these records to provide or enable other healthcare providers to provide quality medical care, to obtain payment for services provided to you as allowed by your health plan and to enable us to meet our professional and legal obligations to operate this medical practice properly. We are required by law to maintain the privacy of protected health information, to provide individuals with notice of our legal duties and privacy practices with respect to protected health information, and to notify affected individuals following a breach of unsecured protected health information. This notice describes how we may use and disclose your medical information. It also describes your rights and legal obligations with respect to your medical information. If you have any questions about this Notice, Please contact our Privacy Officer listed above.

HOW THIS MEDICAL PRACTICE MAY USE OR DISCLOSE YOUR HEALTH INFORMATION

The medical record is the property of this medical practice, but the information in the medical record belongs to you. The law permits us to use or disclose your health information for the following purposes:

For Treatment. We may use your health information to provide you with medical treatment or services. We may disclose health information about you to doctors, nurses, technicians, of staff or other personnel who are involved in taking care of you and your health.

For example, your doctor may be treating you for a heart condition and may need to know if you have other health problems that could complicate your treatment. The doctor may use your medical history to decide what treatment is best for you. The doctor may also tell another doctor about you condition so that doctor can help determine the most appropriate care for you.

Different personnel in our office may share information about you and disclose information to people who do not work in our office in order to coordinate your care, such as phoning in prescriptions to your pharmacy, scheduling lab work and ordering x-rays. Family members and other health care providers may be part of your medical care outside of this office and may require information about you that we may have.

For Payment. We may use and disclose your health information so that treatment and services you receive at this office may be billed to and payment may be collected from you, an insurance company or a third party. For example, we may need to give your health plan information about a service you received here so your health plan will pay us or reimburse you the service. We may also tell your health plan about a treatment you are going to receive to obtain prior approval, or to determine whether your plan will cover the treatment.

For Health Care Operations. We may use and disclose medical information about you to operate this medical practice. For example, we may use and disclose this information to review and improve the quality of care we provide, or the competence and qualifications of our professional staff. Or we may use and disclose this information to get your health plan to authorize services or referrals. We may also use and disclose this information as necessary for medical reviews, legal services and audits, including fraud and abuse detection and compliance programs and business planning and management. We may also share your medical information with our "business associates," such as our billing service, that perform administrative service for us. We have a written contract with each of these business associates that contains terms requiring them and their subcontractors to protect the confidentiality and security of your medical information. Although federal law does not protect health information which is disclosed to someone other than another healthcare provider, health plan, healthcare clearinghouse, or one of their business associates, California law prohibits all recipients of

healthcare information from further disclosing it except as specifically required or permitted by law. We may also share your information with other health care providers, health care clearinghouses or health plans that have a relationship with you, when they request this information to help them with their quality assessment and improvement activities, their patient-safety activities, their population-based efforts to improve health or reduce health care costs, protocol development, case management or care coordination activities, their review of competence, qualifications and performance of health care professionals, their training programs, their accreditation, certification or licensing activities, their activities related to contracts of health insurance or health benefits, or their health care fraud and abuse detection and compliance efforts.

Appointment Reminders. We may use and disclose medical information to contact and remind you about appointments. If you are not home, we may leave this information on your answering machine or in a message left with the person answering the phone.

Notification and Communication with Family and Friends. We may disclose your health information to notify or assist in notifying a family member, your personal representative or another person responsible for your care about your location, your general condition or, unless you have instructed us otherwise, in the event of your death. In the event of a disaster, we may disclose information to a relief organization so that they may coordinate these notification efforts. We may also disclose information to someone who is involved with your care or helps pay for your care. If you are able and available to agree or object, we will give you the opportunity to object prior to making these disclosures, although we may disclose this information in a disaster even over your objection if we believe it is necessary to respond to the emergency circumstances. If you are unable or unavailable to agree or object, our health care professionals will use their best judgment in communication with your family and others. Only those people authorized on the *Acknowledgement of Receipt of Notice* will be able to have access to your actual records and whom we can speak to on your behalf.

In situation, where you are not capable of giving consent (because you are not present or due to your incapacity or medical emergency), we may, using our professional judgment, determine that a disclosure to your family member or friend is in your best interest. In that situation, we will disclose only health information relevant to the person's involvement in your care. For example, we may inform the person who accompanied you to the emergency room that you suffered a heart attack and provide updates on your progress and prognosis. We may also use our professional judgment and experience to make reasonable inferences that it is in your best interest to allow another person to act on your behalf to pick up, for example, filled prescription, medical supplies, or x-rays.

Sale of Health Information. We will not sell your health information without your prior written authorization. The authorization will disclose that we will receive compensation for your health information if you authorize us to sell it, and we will stop any future sales of your information to the extent that you revoke that authorization.

Treatment Alternatives. We may tell you about or recommend possible treatment alternatives that may be of interest to you.

Marketing. Provided we do not receive any payment for making these communications, we may tell you about health related products or services related to your treatments, case management or care coordination, or to direct or recommend other treatments, therapies, health care providers or settings of care that may be of interest to you.

To Avert a Serious Threat to Health or Safety. We may use and disclose your health information when necessary to prevent a serious threat to your health and safety or if safety of the public or another person is in danger.

Proof of Immunization. We will disclose proof of immunization to a school where the law requires the school to have such information prior to admitting a student if you agree to the disclosure on behalf of yourself or your dependent.

Required by Law. We will disclose health information about you when required to by federal, state or local law.

Research. We may use and disclose health information about you for research projects that are subject to a special approval process. We will ask for your permission if the researcher will have access to your name, address or other information that reveals who you are, or will be involved in your care at the office.

Organ and Tissue Donation. If you are an organ donor, we may release health information to organizations that handle organ procurement of organ, eye or tissue transplantation organ donation bank, as necessary to facilitate such donation and transplantation.

Specialized Government Functions. If you are or were a member of the armed forces, part of the national security, or intelligence communities, we may be commanded by the military or other government authorities to release health information about you. We may also release information about foreign military personnel to the appropriate authority.

Workers' Compensation. We may release health information about you for workers' compensation or similar programs. These programs provide benefits for work-related injuries or illness.

Change of Ownership. In the event that this medical practice is sold or merged with another organization, your health information/record will become the property of the new owner, although you will maintain the right to request that copies of your health information be transferred to another physician or medical group.

Public Health Risks. We may disclose health information about you for public health reasons in order to prevent or control disease, injury or disability; or report births, death, suspected abuse or neglect, non-accidental physical injuries, reactions to medications or problems with products.

Health Oversight Activities. We may disclose health information to a health oversight agency for audits, investigations, inspections, or licensing purposes. These disclosures may be necessary for certain state and federal agencies to monitor the health care system, government programs, and compliance with civil rights.

Judicial and Administrative Proceedings. We may, and sometimes are required by law, to disclose your health information in the course of any administrative or judicial proceeding to the extent expressly authorized by a court or administrative order. We may also disclose information about you in response to a subpoena, discovery request or other lawful process if reasonable efforts have been made to notify you of the request and you have not objected, or if your objections have been resolved by a court or administrative order.

Lawsuits and Disputes. If you are involved in a lawsuit or a dispute, we may disclose health information about you in response to a court or administrative order. Subject to all applicable legal requirements, we may also disclose health information about you in response to a subpoena.

Law Enforcement. We may, and are sometimes required by law, to disclose your health information to a law enforcement official for purposes such as identifying or locating a suspect, fugitive, material witness or missing person, complying with a court order, warrant grand jury subpoena and other law enforcement purposes.

Coroners, Medical Examiners, and Funeral Directors. We may release health information to a coroner or medical examiner. This may be necessary, for example, to identify or determine the cause of death.

Breach Notification. In the case of a breach of unsecured protected health information, we will notify you as requires by law. If you have provided us with current email address, we may use email to communicate information related to the breach. In some circumstances our business associate may provide the notification. We may also provide notification by other methods as appropriate.

When This Medical Practice May Not Use or Disclose Your Health Information

Except as described in this Notice of Privacy Practices, this medical practice will, consistent with its legal obligations, not use or disclose health information which identifies you without your written authorization. If you do authorize this medical practice to use or disclose your health information for another purpose, you may revoke your authorization in writing at any time.

YOUR HEALTH INFORMATION RIGHTS

Right to Request Special Privacy Protections. You have the right to request restrictions on certain uses and disclosures of your health information by a written request specifying what information you want to limit, and what limitations on our use or disclosure of that information you wish to have imposed. If you tell us not to disclose information to your commercial health plan concerning health care items or services for which you paid for in full out-of-pocket, we will abide by your request, unless we must disclose information for treatment or legal reasons. We serve the right to accept or reject any request, and will notify you of your decision.

Right to Inspect and Copy. You have the right to inspect and copy your health information, with limited exceptions. To access your medical information, you must submit a written request detailing what information you want access to, whether you want to inspect it or get a copy of it, and if you want a copy, your preferred form and format. We will provide copies in your requested form and format if it is readily producible, or we will provide you with an alternative format you find acceptable, or we can't agree and we maintain the record in an electronic format, your choice of a readable electronic or hardcopy format. We will also send a copy to any other person you designate in writing. We will charge a reasonable fee which also covers our costs for labor, supplies, postage and if requested and agreed to in advance, the cost of preparing an explanation or summary as allowed by federal and California Law. We may deny your request under limited circumstances.

Right to Request Confidential Communications. You have the right to request that we communicate with you about medical matters in a certain way or at a certain location. For example, you can ask that we only contact you at work or by mail.

To request confidential communications, you may complete and submit the *Request for Restriction on Use/Disclosure of Medical Information and/or Confidential Communication* to **Leslie Dullman, Office Manager**. Your request must specify how or where you wish to be contacted. We will not ask you the reason for your request. We will accommodate all reasonable requests.

Right to Amend. You have the right to request that we amend your health information that you believe is incorrect or incomplete. You must make a request to amend in writing, and include the reasons you believe the information is inaccurate or incomplete. We are not required to change your health, and will provide you with information about this medical practice's denial and how you can disagree with the denial. We may deny your request if we do not have the information, if we did not create the information (unless the person or entity that created the information is no longer available to make the amendment), if you would not be permitted to inspect or copy the information at issue, or if the information is accurate and complete as is. If we deny your request, you may submit a written statement of your disagreement with that decision, and we may, in turn, prepare a written rebuttal. You also have the right to request that we add to your record a statement of up to 250 words concerning anything in the record you believe to be incomplete or incorrect. All information related to any requests to amend or supplement will be maintained and disclosed in conjunction with any subsequent disclosure of the disputed information.

Right to an Accounting of Disclosures. You have a right to receive an accounting of disclosures of your health information made by this medical practice, except that this medical practice does not have to account for the disclosures provided to you or pursuant to your written authorization, or as described in paragraphs 1(treatment), 2 (payment), 3(health care operations), 5(notification and communication with family) and 14(specialized government functions) of Section A of this Notice of Privacy Practices or disclosures for purposes of research or public health which exclude direct patient identifiers, or which are incident to a use or disclosure otherwise permitted or authorized by law, or the disclosures to a health oversight agency or law enforcement official to the extent this medical practice has received notice from that agency or official that providing this accounting would be reasonably likely to impede their activities.

Right to a Paper Copy of This Notice. You have the right to a paper copy of this notice. You may ask us to give you a copy of this notice at any time. Even if you have agreed to receive it electronically, you are still entitled to a paper copy. To obtain such a copy, contact the front desk.

CHANGES TO THIS NOTICE OF PRIVACY PRACTICE

We reserve the right to amend our privacy practices and the terms of this Notice of Privacy Practices at any time in the future. Until such amendment is made. We are required by law to comply with this Notice. After an amendment is made, the revised Notice of Privacy Protections will apply to all protected health information that we maintain, regardless of when it was created or received. We will keep a copy of the current notice at the front desk and a copy will be available at each appointment. We will also post the current notice on our website. www.desertgastro.net

COMPLAINTS

Complaints about this Notice of Privacy Practices or how this medical practice handles your health information should be directed to our Privacy Officer listed at the top of this Notice of Privacy Practices. You will not be penalized for filling a complaint.

If you are not satisfied with the manner in which this office handles a complaint, you may submit a formal complaint to:

Region IX
Office for Civil Rights
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
90 7th Street, Suite 4-100
San Francisco, CA 94103
(415) 437-8310; (415) 437-8311 (TDD); (415) 437-8239 (FAX)
OCRMail@hhs.gov