

## ROCKY MOUNTAIN SURGICAL ASSOCIATES, P.C.

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### Electronic Communication (E-mail) Agreement

Electronic (online) communications include e-mail, webmail, secure messaging, and electronic file transfer to exchange information between computers, tablets, or smartphones. These can be useful ways for patients and healthcare providers to communicate, in addition to more usual visits and phone calls.

#### Advantages

- E-mail is a simple, convenient and popular way of connecting; many people use it regularly
- Messages can be sent and received without needing both parties online at the same time
- Messages can be saved, copied and forwarded; they keep a record of what was said
- Some messaging systems are encrypted to help keep information private
- Some questions and issues can be handled by online messaging without a phone call or visit

#### Disadvantages

- E-mail devices and connections can fail, messages can be lost or sent to the wrong person
- There is not always a way to know if a message was ever received
- Messages can contain typing mistakes
- If the other party is away or their device is turned off, messages might not be seen promptly
- It is possible for a dishonest person to send a false message or impersonate a patient or a doctor
- If both parties are not online at the same time, there is no opportunity to clarify misunderstandings
- Saved copies or messages sent in error can't be erased or retracted
- Messages can contain viruses that can damage systems or steal information
- Some medical questions and issues cannot be handled through online messaging

#### Our E-mail Policies

1. **No emergencies or urgent messages.** E-mail is not to be used for emergencies or urgent messages. We do not monitor our In-Box constantly. You can send a message any time, but we may not read it until the next business day. We check messages during regular work hours, and answer them in the order received. We try to deal with messages within 1 work day, but circumstances could cause us to fall behind. Use the telephone if you need a response right away. Of course, in a life-threatening emergency call 911.
2. **Uses.** Our practice accepts E-mail messages for these purposes:
  - a. **General messages** like making or changing appointments, billing issues, or other questions that can be answered by any appropriate staff person.
  - b. **Medical questions.** Our providers may give their professional E-mail addresses to you for medical questions. Although they might sometimes reply after hours, you should not expect providers to monitor their mail continuously. Even on call, it's likely the provider is not sitting at a computer. Again, if you have a problem that needs attention right away, use the telephone.

3. **Part of the record.** E-mail messages are considered part of your medical record. Our policies for record privacy and appropriate uses of medical information apply to messages we send to each other.
4. **Security.** You need to protect the E-mail address you give us, to make sure our communications remain private. This is the only way we can trust that messages from your E-mail are really from you, and messages we send are not going to someone else. If we aren't sure about a message, we will try to contact you in some other way.
5. **Availability.** If you ask us to use E-mail to communicate with you, we will assume that you check your In-Box at reasonable intervals. We don't guarantee that we will respond to your messages and we understand you can't guarantee that you will respond to ours. In cases of uncertainty, we will try other ways of communicating.
6. **Sensitive medical information.** We can't always know what information you consider especially private. We take care with all medical records, but we know that some facts are more sensitive than others. Because E-mail can't be guaranteed 100% secure, please don't put extremely sensitive matters in messages without considering this.
7. **Voluntary.** Using E-mail is voluntary for both of us. If we feel you are using E-mail inappropriately (or, if we think your address has been hacked by an imposter), we may block your messages. If you decide you don't want to receive E-mail from us any longer, just let us know.
8. **Changes of address.** If your E-mail address changes, you need to let us know.
9. **Non-essential uses.** We will only use your E-mail address for important communications related to our practice. We will not give your E-mail address to anyone who is not part of our practice. Please don't send non-essential messages to us, because they slow down our ability to respond to the important ones.
10. **Mistakes.** Mistakes happen. If you believe you have received or sent a message by mistake, or one that contains errors, please let us know. You should delete messages that are not intended for you.
11. **Other risks.** In addition to those above, electronic communication can have other risks and disadvantages that might cause inconvenience or harm. Everyone using E-mail needs to use good judgment about these valuable technologies, and must remember that there are alternatives that would be better for some situations.

#### Acknowledgement and Agreement

I acknowledge that I have read this form. I understand that electronic (online) communication has risks, including possible risks not mentioned above. I agree to abide by the policies described above. I agree to use reasonable judgment with regard to any messages I send or receive. I do not have any unanswered questions about what this Agreement requires.

Patient (or legal representative) name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address to be used: \_\_\_\_\_