



# Carteret Health Care Privacy Practices

## Overview

Carteret Health Care includes the following entities:

- Carteret Health Care
- Carteret Medical Group

Effective April 1, 2003

Modified August 1, 2013

Effective September 1, 2013

This notice describes how medical information about you may be used and shared and how you can get access to this information. Please review it carefully.

## Our pledge to protect your health information.

We understand that information about you and your health is personal. We're committed to protecting your health information. We will create a record of the care and services you receive at Carteret Health Care, its subsidiaries and other related entities. We use and share this record to provide you with quality care and to comply with certain legal requirements. This record will be available to all health care professionals who need access as described in this Notice, many of whom will be involved in your treatment at any of our facilities or practices. This Notice will apply to all of the records of your care that we maintain.

This Notice will tell you about the ways we may use and share your health information. It also describes your rights and certain obligations we have regarding how we use and share your health information.

We are required by law to:

- Maintain the privacy of your health information as outlined in this Notice
- Provide you notice of our legal duties and privacy practices with respect to your health information
- Follow the terms of the Notice that are currently in effect

### *Who will follow this notice?*

- Any health care professional authorized to enter information into your Carteret Health Care medical record, including doctors on the medical staff and other providers and personnel while at one of our health care facilities or practices
- All employees, staff, volunteers and other personnel

In addition, our facilities may share health information with each other for treatment, payment or healthcare operations as described in this Notice.

### *How is your information used?*

For Treatment: We may use and share your health information to provide, coordinate or manage your health care and related services, both among our own providers, and with others involved in your care. For example, a doctor treating you for a broken leg may need to know if you have diabetes because it affects the healing process. S/he may tell the dietitian so you can have appropriate meals. S/he may tell a case manager so you can get proper resources at discharge. Also, different CHC departments may share your health information in order to coordinate the different things you need, such as prescriptions, lab work and x-rays.



**For Payment:** Generally, we may use and share your health information with others to bill and collect payment for the treatment and services we provide to you. Before you receive scheduled services, we may contact your health plan to ask for approval of payment, or we might contact Medicare or Medicaid to inquire as to whether you qualify for coverage. Also, we may share portions of your health information with billing departments, insurance companies, health plans and their agents, and consumer reporting agencies. For example, if you broke your leg, we may need to share information about your condition, the supplies used (such as plaster for your cast or crutches), and the services you received (such as X-rays or surgery) with your health plan so they will pay.

**For Health Care Operations:** We may use and share health information to conduct our business activities and health care operations that assist us in improving the quality and cost of the care we provide to you and other patients. For example, we may look at patient records to review our treatment and services and to evaluate the performance of our staff. Also, we may use patient health information to decide what new services we should offer, what services are not needed, and whether certain new treatments are effective. We may share information for education, licensing, legal and other purposes.

**Appointment Reminders:** We may use and disclose medical information to contact you as a reminder that you have an appointment for treatment or medical care.

**Treatment Alternatives:** We may use and disclose medical information to tell you about or recommend possible treatment options or alternatives that may be of interest to you.

**Health-Related Benefits and Services:** We may use and share health information to tell you about health-related benefits or services that may be of interest to you, or to tell you about new facilities that we're opening.

**Business Associates:** We sometimes hire other people to help us perform our services or operate our entities. We may share your health information with them so that they can perform the job we have asked them to do. We require them to protect your health information and keep it confidential. For example, we may hire a transcription service to transcribe parts of your medical record, or collection agencies to collect payment.

## Uses of health information from which you may opt out

**Fundraising Activities:** We may use your health information to contact you in an effort to raise money for Carteret Health Care and its operations. We may share health information with a related foundation, which may contact you regarding raising money for a treatment or service related cause. You have a right to opt out of fundraising communications.

**Hospital Directory (Census Listing):** Unless you opt out, we may include your name, location in the hospital and your general condition (e.g., good, fair, serious, etc.) in the hospital directory while you're a patient. The directory information may be released to people who ask for you by name. Unless you opt out, we can also share this information, as well as your religious affiliation, with clergy affiliated with your faith, regardless of whether they ask for you by name. To opt out of being included in the directory, notify the staff member registering you or providing your care.

**Mental Health:** If you received treatment at a mental health facility, your information can be shared with other providers outside of the mental health facility for purposes of treatment, payment and health care operations. For example, if you're having surgery at a hospital, your surgeon can review your mental health treatment information to make sure the plan of care is right for you. You have the right to opt out of the mental health facility information being available by requesting the Opt Out Form from your mental health provider and submitting it. Please allow five business days for the opt out to take effect. You can opt back in by giving similar notice. Note that there are some situations in which we can share your mental health information even if you opt out, such as in an emergency.

**Individuals Involved in Your Care or Payment for Your Care:** We may release medical information about you to a friend or family member who is involved in your medical care (for example: spouse, parent, guardian, children, etc.) while you are in the hospital or in the care of one of the entities of Carteret General Hospital. In addition, we may disclose medical information about you to an entity assisting in a disaster relief effort so that your family can be notified about your condition, status and location.

**Research:** Under certain circumstances, we may use and disclose medical information about you for research purposes. For example, a research project may involve comparing the health and recovery of all patients who receive one medication to those who receive another, for the same condition. All research projects, however, are subject to a special approval process. This process evaluates a proposed research project and its use of medical information, trying to balance the research needs with patients' need for privacy of their medical information. Before we use or disclose medical information for research, the project will have been approved through this research approval process, but we may, however, disclose medical information about you to people preparing to conduct a research project, for example, to help them look for patients with specific medical needs, so



long as the medical information they review does not leave the hospital. We will almost always ask for your specific 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 hospital.

## Health information exchanges

We may provide your health care information to a health information exchange (HIE) in which we participate. A HIE is a health information database where other health care providers caring for you can access your medical information from wherever they are if they are members of the HIE. These providers may include your doctors, nursing facilities, home health agencies or other providers who care for you outside of our hospitals or our practices. For example, you may be traveling and have an accident in another area of the state. If the doctor treating you is a member of the HIE in which we participate, s/he can access the information about you that other providers have contributed. Accessing this additional information can help your doctor provide you with well informed care quickly because s/he will have learned about your medical history or allergies or prescriptions from the HIE. If you don't want your medical information to be contributed to the HIE and shared with these member health care providers, you can opt out by completing the Opt Out Form. It will take five business days for the opt-out to go into effect. Note that if you opt out, your providers may not have the most recent information about you, which may affect your care.

## Special situations

In some situations, we may use or share your health information without your permission or allowing you an opportunity to object. Examples of these situations include:

- When Required by Law
- For Organ, Eye or Tissue Donation Purposes
- For Public Health Activities (such as to prevent or control disease, injury, or disability; to report reactions to medicine or problems with medical products, etc.)
- For Health Oversight Activities
- For a Legal Proceeding
- To Law Enforcement
- To Avoid a Serious Threat to Health or Safety
- To Coroners, Medical Examiners and Funeral Directors
- For Disaster Relief
- For Research
- For Specialized Government Functions
- For Workers' Compensation

## State and federal laws

Sometimes, state or federal laws require us to protect or share your health information in keeping with or in addition to the ways stated in this Notice. For example, State law protects your health information under the doctor-patient privilege. There are also situations when we're required or permitted to share your information under the law, such as to report gunshot wounds or child abuse. The following are just a few examples of some common situations where state or federal laws require us to protect or share your information:

### Treatment for Drug and Alcohol Use:

If you receive treatment for drug or alcohol use in a federally funded rehabilitation center, federal laws prevent us from releasing that information, except in certain situations. For example, if there's an emergency, or if you threaten to hurt someone, we can share the information as necessary.



## Unemancipated Minors:

In North Carolina, if you're under the age of 18, are not married and haven't been legally emancipated, you can consent to treatment for pregnancy, drug and/or alcohol abuse, venereal disease, or emotional disturbances without an adult. This information will remain confidential, unless your doctor determines your parents or guardian need to know this information because there's a serious threat to your life or health. Note that minors are still required to get parental or court consent for an abortion.

## Inspections and Surveys:

One or more of our facilities and services are subject to inspection by state and federal agencies and accreditation representatives who may review patient health information, which we are required to provide. For example, the State may ask to review records as part of their review of our hospitals license or review of a complaint (you may have certain rights to object to review of your record). Also, a licensing board may review records when evaluating a providers' qualifications or investigating a matter.

## Other uses of health information

Before we use or share your health information in a manner not covered by this Notice or required or permitted by applicable laws, we will ask for your written permission. We may also remove all identifiers from your information to make it anonymous, and use or share it for other purposes.

### *Your rights regarding your health information*

You have the following rights regarding the health information we maintain about you:

1. **Access To A Copy Of Your Health Records:**

You can ask to see and get a copy of your health record and other health information. You may not be able to get all of your information in a few special cases. For example, if your doctor decides something in your file might endanger you or someone else, your request for access may be denied.

- In most cases, copies of your health record will be given to you within 30 days, but this time frame can be extended for another 30 days, if needed.
- You may have to pay for the cost of copying and mailing if you request copies and mailing.

To request a copy of your health record, you must complete an authorization for disclosure of health information and submit it to Medical Records.

2. **Revoke An Authorization:**

If you've provided us permission to use or share your health information, you may revoke that permission at any time by writing a letter to Medical Records. If you revoke your permission, we will no longer use or share your health information for the reasons covered by your written authorization. You understand that we're unable to take back any information we have already shared before you notified us of your revocation.

3. **Request Changes To Your Health Information:**

You can ask to change or add information to your health record that you think is wrong or incomplete. A request to change your health information is also known as a "request for amendment." The provider has the right to decide whether to grant the request for amendment. For example, if you and your provider agree that your file has the wrong result for a test, the provider will change it. However, if your provider believes the test result is correct, then your request for a change may be denied, but your disagreement will be noted in your file.

- To request an amendment you must complete a request to amend medical records and submit it to Director of Medical Records. You must describe the amendment and provide a reason why it should be made.
- We will usually respond to your request for amendment within 60 days, but it may take an extra 30 days in some cases. If we need an extension, we'll provide you with the reason.

4. **Obtain A List Of When And Why Your Health Information Was Shared:**

You have the right to request an "accounting of disclosures." This is a list of the people with whom your health information has been shared (it does not include those involved in treatment, payment, or for health care operations, or as authorized by you). To get this list, you must complete a request for accounting of disclosures and submit it to Medical Records. You must include the time frame for the request.

- In most cases, we will get you the accounting of disclosures within 60 days, but it may take an extra 30 days in some cases. If we need an extension, we will provide you with the reason.



5. **Request Restrictions On Sharing Of Your Information:** You have the right to request a restriction or limitation on the health information we use or share about you for treatment, payment or health care operations. You also have the right to request that we limit the health information we share about you to someone who is involved in your care, such as a family member or friend. For example, you could ask that we not share with your sibling's information about a surgery you had. To request a restriction, you must submit the request to restrict uses and disclosures of protected health information form and submit it to the Medical Records Director. In your request, you must tell us (1) what information you want to limit; (2) whether you want to limit the use, or sharing of information or both; and (3) to whom you want the limits to apply (for example, sharing with your spouse). We are not required to agree to your request. If we do agree, your restrictions may not be followed in some situations, such as emergencies or when required by law.
  - Note that if you ask us not to share health information with your health plan for items or services for which you paid in full, out of pocket, we will not share the information with the plan unless required by law.
6. **Request That We Change How We Contact You:**

You can make reasonable requests to be contacted at different places or in different ways. For example, you can have the nurse call you on your cell phone instead of your home number, or ask that your lab results be sent to your office instead of to your home. If sending information to you at home might put you in danger, your health provider must talk, call, or write to you where you ask and in the way you ask, if the request is reasonable. You are not required to tell us the reason for your request. We will accommodate all reasonable requests, but your request must specify how or where you wish to be contacted. We may also ask how you will handle payments.
7. **Right To A Paper Copy Of This Notice:**

You have the right to a paper copy of this Notice upon request. You may also obtain a copy of this Notice at any time from our website, or from the facility where you obtained treatment.
8. **Right To Be Notified Of A Breach:**

You have the right to be notified if your health information is acquired, used or shared in a manner not permitted under law which compromises the security or privacy of your health information.

## Changes to this notice

We reserve the right to change this Notice. We reserve the right to make the revised Notice effective for health information we already have about you, as well as any health information we create or receive in the future. The Notice will contain the effective date on the first page. We will post a copy of the current Notice of Privacy Practices at each treatment facility and on our website, [www.CarteretHealth.org](http://www.CarteretHealth.org).

## Complaints

If you believe your information was used or shared in a way that is not allowed under the privacy law or if you believe your rights were denied you can file a complaint with Carteret Health Care and with the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services. To file a complaint with us you may call the Integrity Line at [252-808-6101](tel:252-808-6101). To get information on how to file a complaint with the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, please contact the Chief Privacy Officer at [252-808-6705](tel:252-808-6705). You will not be penalized for filing a complaint.