

# Lake Macquarie Medical Centre

Santorini Apartments, 15/24-26 Brooks Parade, Belmont, NSW 2280

Telephone 4945 0322 Fax 4945 9968

---

## Practice Communication Policy

### Purpose

- To ensure safe, effective, timely and respectful communication between the practice, patients and external providers in accordance with RACGP 5th Edition accreditation standards.

### Scope

- Applies to all practice staff, contractors and volunteers. Covers verbal, written and electronic communications including phone, face-to-face, SMS, email, patient portal, telehealth, website and social media.

### Principles

- Patient-centred: communicate clearly, respectfully and in ways appropriate to patient needs (language, literacy, disability, cultural sensitivities).
- Confidentiality and privacy: protect patient information in accordance with the Privacy Act, Australian Privacy Principles and practice privacy policy.
- Accuracy and timeliness: provide accurate, verified information and respond within published timeframes.
- Safety: ensure communication supports clinical safety, escalation of urgent issues and appropriate follow-up.
- Informed consent: obtain and document consent for use of electronic communications where required.

### Modes of communication and standards

- Telephone
  - Staff will identify themselves and the practice at the start of each call.
  - Calls about clinical problems will be triaged by trained staff; urgent matters will be escalated to a clinician immediately.
  - Telephone messages and instructions are recorded in the patient record, including action taken and staff member name.
- Face-to-face
  - Privacy is maintained for consultations and sensitive discussions; escort patients to private spaces when necessary.

- SMS and secure messaging
  - Used for appointment reminders, recalls, brief administrative information and agreed clinical alerts.
  - Content is kept brief and non-sensitive; no diagnostic or complex clinical advice is provided by SMS.
  - Patients must opt in to SMS; opt-out instructions provided.
  - Our SMS ID is LakeMacMed
- Email
  - Non-urgent administrative and educational information may be sent via email if patient has consented. Our email address Lakemacmc@gmail.com
  - Email is not used for urgent clinical matters or to convey sensitive clinical information unless secure/encrypted email is in place and patient has consented.
  - Standard disclaimer about confidentiality and response times is included.
- Patient portal / secure messaging / telehealth
  - Encouraged for safe, auditable clinical communication, test results, medication lists and secure messages.
  - Response timeframes are published and adhered to.
- Website and social media
  - Website provides practice hours, contact details, services offered, privacy and access information, after-hours arrangements and how to seek urgent care.
  - Social media used only for general practice information and health promotion; not for individual clinical advice or to respond to personal health queries.
  - All public content is approved by an authorised practice representative.

#### Response times and after-hours

- Routine administrative enquiries: within 2 business days.
- Non-urgent clinical enquiries: acknowledged within 1 business day; clinical response or plan within 2 business days where clinically appropriate.
- Urgent or life-threatening: patients instructed to call emergency services (000) or present to the nearest emergency department. After-hours care arrangements are clearly advertised.

- Documented escalation pathways exist for late, missed or complex responses.

#### Confidentiality, privacy and record-keeping

- All relevant communications are documented in the patient's clinical record, including date, time, content summary and staff member.
- Secure systems and strong passwords are used for electronic communications; devices are protected against unauthorised access.
- De-identified or aggregated communication content may be used for quality improvement or education.

#### Consent, language and accessibility

- Obtain and record patient consent for electronic communications and alternative contact methods.
- Offer interpreter services for patients with limited English; provide accessible formats on request for people with sensory or cognitive disabilities.

#### Clinical safety and risk management

- Clinically relevant communications follow clinical governance processes; significant communications are flagged for clinician review.
- Staff are trained in triage, escalation and identifying red flags that require immediate clinician intervention.

#### Staff responsibilities and training

- Staff must follow this policy and complete communication, privacy and cultural safety training on induction and regularly thereafter.
- Roles for monitoring inboxes, phone lines and portal messages are defined and rostered.

#### Quality improvement and review

- Communication practices are audited regularly; complaints and incidents inform continuous improvement.
- This policy will be reviewed at least every 24 months or sooner when legislation, accreditation standards or practice circumstances change.

#### Contact

- For communication-related concerns or to change communication preferences, contact:  
Lake Macquarie Medical Centre, Phone: 02 4945 0322, Email: Lakemacmc@gmail.com,  
Address: 15/24-26 Brooks Pde Belmont 2280

#### Version and approval

- Policy approved by: Dr Tian Zhuang
- Effective date: 20/06/2026 Review date: 21/06/2026

