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Communications Policy

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Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish the standard at which all communications between Communitas Clinics (Communitas), its patients and other external persons will be conducted, and how this will be incorporated into the various forms in which communication can take place.

Communication Standards

The following standards of communication will be adhered to by Communitas staff at all times:

- Patients and visitors must be dealt with in a positive, efficient manner
- Communication will be delivered in a timely fashion, and in a format relevant to the information being given
- Information will be in plain language which cannot be misinterpreted. Use of jargon and unknown abbreviations are to be avoided
- Communication will be open and honest, with further explanation given where decisions made give-rise to additional queries
- All communication with patients and visitors will be consistent with Communitas' policies, protocols and procedures and, where required, be reflective of the NHS as a whole
- All general patient communications will ensure they reach the correct patient groups in the appropriate format in a timely fashion.

Communication Types

- Face-to-face
- Telephone
- Letter
- Fax
- E-mail
- Website

Communications *Policy*

Face-to-face

- Communitas staff will be polite, positive and efficient towards patients and visitors
- CC reception staff will aim to see any patient or visitor within 5 minutes. Communitas' aim is that patient appointments will commence within 30 minutes of their scheduled time. Where there may be confrontation from a patient, carer or representative, staff should try to remain relaxed and calm, listen to their concerns carefully and then request they take a seat while they address the problem.
- Where a problem exists and it is due to lack of understanding/ notice on the part of the patient, carer or representative, Communitas will produce and use appropriate leaflets and posters to inform them why their problem cannot be resolved immediately. (People tend to respond more positively to official documents and notices)
- Communitas will use a face-to-face opportunity to inform patients about other NHS clinics, NHS services and focus groups that may be of interest.

Telephone

- Communitas staff will be polite, positive and efficient towards any person who calls Communitas or when calling externally themselves (smiling when talking comes across to the person at the end of the line)
- When receiving calls at Communitas, staff will aim to answer within 3 rings
- When answering the telephone Communitas staff will say the following introduction: Good morning/ afternoon, Dermatology/ ENT, (name) speaking, how may I help you
- Staff should listen carefully to the enquiry being made, then field the call to the appropriate person where possible
- If the call is for a doctor or nurse in surgery, then a call-back is likely to be necessary. Please inform the person calling when a call-back is possible and agree a mutually convenient time/ best contact number
- Where the person being asked for is not available, the staff member who answers the call should take an appropriately detailed message, including: name and address of caller, telephone number, details of query, time when call-back is convenient. Telephone messages should be sent to the requested person via NHS email
- If a caller is put on-hold, they should be regularly informed by the staff member who has answered that they are still on-hold and that they will be dealt with shortly
- Communitas does not expect a caller to be holding for more than a few minutes; if this case arises the caller should be asked if they would prefer a call back
- Before calling a patient, ensure that use of the telephone is appropriate for the message being given. In certain circumstances a face-to-face meeting may be more beneficial
- When calling externally, Communitas staff will ensure they are speaking to the correct person before divulging any patient-sensitive information
- If the intended recipient of the call is unavailable, enquire when would be a suitable time to call back

Letter

Staff members will consider the following points when receiving, writing or sending any letter:

- Reply to letters received by Communitas within 2 working days
- Letters should be written using company templates where appropriate, to promote consistency and a business-like approach
- Letters written will be clear and easy to understand (make sure you do not over-complicate text unnecessarily)
- Ensure the layout of text is clear and that it includes paragraphs, indents and breaks
- Your text should be left-hand aligned for clarity (remember that justified text is more difficult to read for people with visual impairments)
- The letter should be free from jargon and abbreviations (Communitas internal references will not mean anything to external persons)
- **Spell and grammar check your letter**
- Provide a named contact in-case of query, complaint or if a response letter is required
- A direct telephone number will be provided where possible
- Any instructions and directions given must be clear and concise
- Where previous errors have been made, a clear explanation and/ or apology will be included
- The tone of the letter will be in-line with Communitas policy/ values
- Personalise your letter rather than signing it from Communitas

Fax

Staff members should remember the following points when sending a fax, bearing in mind that some numbers will not always be attended by the intended recipient:

- Data sent will be restricted to the minimum necessary for the purpose
- Where patient-identifiable data is sent, information regarding individuals unconnected with the matter will be anonymised. Where possible use the NHS number, Social Services identification number or initials as opposed to name and address. Names and addresses could be sent by another method such as: postal or by telephone
- Staff will only fax patient names and addresses when absolutely necessary, such as in those circumstances where there are no other common items between the parties;
- Faxes will NEVER be used to transmit highly confidential or sensitive information;
- Before sending a confidential fax, call the recipient to pre-warn them (unless faxing to an unstaffed fax machine such as out-of-hours services);
- Ask for confirmation from the recipient upon receipt of the fax within an agreed timescale;
- When the intended recipient of a confidential fax is contacted before the fax has been sent, that person will ensure that either they or someone on their behalf is waiting for receipt of it;
- When sending a fax, use a cover sheet with a confidentiality statement;
- Use programmed numbers wherever possible to avoid misdialling, or check the number before the fax is sent and dial carefully;
- On completion, retain the printed record of transmission as confirmation the fax was successful (this may need to be requested if not automatic). Include the record on file along with a copy of the cover sheet as proof of sending
- When receiving faxes; printouts will not be left unattended at the fax machine. Faxes will be sorted and placed in the relevant service fax tray for processing

E-mail

- E-mails written will be clear and easy to understand (make sure you do not over-complicate text unnecessarily)
- Ensure the layout of text on your e-mail is clear and that it includes paragraphs, indents and breaks
- The e-mail will be free from jargon and abbreviations (Communitas internal references will not mean anything to external persons)
- Spell and grammar check your e-mail!
- Provide a named Communitas contact in-case of query, complaint or if a response is required
- A direct telephone number will be provided where possible
- Any instructions and directions given must be clear and concise
- Where previous errors have been made, a clear explanation and / or apology will be included
- The tone of the e-mail will be in-line with Communitas policy/ values and, where relevant, the NHS as a whole
- Personalise your e-mail rather than signing it from Communitas
- Implement a Communitas style for all correspondence to promote consistency and a business-like approach.
- Do not include personal opinions on any e-mail sent from Communitas
- Communitas e-mail facilities will not be used for personal use without the express permission of a member of the management team
- E-mails will only be used where this is deemed appropriate for the message being sent. In certain circumstances a telephone call or face-to-face meeting may be more beneficial.

Website

- Communitas' website will be simply formatted, clear and easy to understand
- Communitas departments will be listed, with named contacts provided
- Communitas's address will be displayed, along with clear and concise directions
- Details of clinics, services (including timings) and patient groups will be given
- Up to date Freedom of Information statement will be easily accessible
- Complaint procedures will be published and easily accessible
- All amendments/ additions to the website will be approved by Senior Management/ IG Lead prior to execution