

Senior Connections

Notice of Policies and Practices to Protect the Privacy of Your Health Information

THIS NOTICE DESCRIBES HOW PSYCHOLOGICAL AND MEDICAL INFORMATION ABOUT YOU MAY BE USED AND DISCLOSED AND HOW YOU CAN GET ACCESS TO THIS INFORMATION. PLEASE REVIEW IT CAREFULLY.

I. Uses and Disclosures for Treatment, Payment, and Health Care Operations

We may use or disclose your *protected health information (PHI)*, for *treatment, payment, and health care operations* purposes. To help clarify these terms, here are some definitions:

- “*PHI*” refers to information in your health record that could identify you.
- “*Treatment, Payment and Health Care Operations*”
 - *Treatment* is when we provide, coordinate or manage your health care and other services related to your health care. An example of treatment would be when we consult with another health care provider, such as your family physician, another psychologist or facility staff.
 - *Payment* is when we obtain reimbursement for your healthcare. Examples of payment are when we disclose your PHI to your health insurer to obtain reimbursement for your health care or to determine eligibility or coverage.
 - *Health Care Operations* are activities that relate to the performance and operation of our practice. Examples of health care operations are quality assessment and improvement activities, business-related matters such as audits and administrative services, and case management and care coordination.
- “*Use*” applies only to activities within our practice group such as sharing, employing, applying, utilizing, examining, and analyzing information that identifies you.
- “*Disclosure*” applies to activities outside of the facility or our practice group such as releasing, transferring, or providing access to information about you to other parties.

II. Uses and Disclosures Requiring Authorization

We may use or disclose PHI for purposes outside of treatment, payment, and health care operations when your appropriate authorization is obtained. An “*authorization*” is written permission above and beyond the general consent that permits only specific disclosures. In those instances when we are asked for information for purposes outside of treatment, payment and health care operations, we will obtain an authorization from you before releasing this information. We will also need to obtain an authorization before releasing your psychotherapy notes. “*Psychotherapy notes*” are notes we have made about our conversation during a private, group, joint, or family counseling session, which we have kept separate from the rest of your medical record. These notes are given a greater degree of protection than PHI. . It is not our current practice to regularly maintain any notes separate from the rest of your medical record. In the event we do maintain a separate file of psychotherapy notes those records will be given a greater degree of protection than PHI in accordance with this section.

You may revoke all such authorizations (of PHI or psychotherapy notes) at any time, provided each revocation is in writing. You may not revoke an authorization to the extent that (1) we have

relied on that authorization; or (2) if the authorization was obtained as a condition of obtaining insurance coverage, and the law provides the insurer the right to contest the claim under the policy.

III. Uses and Disclosures with Neither Consent nor Authorization

We may use or disclose PHI without your consent or authorization in the following circumstances:

- **Adult and Domestic Abuse:** If we have reasonable cause to believe that abandonment, abuse, financial exploitation, or neglect of a vulnerable adult has occurred, we must immediately report the abuse to the Washington Department of Social and Health Services. If we have reason to suspect that sexual or physical assault has occurred, we must immediately report to the appropriate law enforcement agency and to the Department of Social and Health Services.
- **Health Oversight:** If the Washington Examining Board of Psychology subpoenas me as part of its investigations, hearings or proceedings relating to the discipline, issuance or denial of licensure of state licensed psychologists, we must comply with its orders. This could include disclosing your relevant mental health information.
- **Judicial or Administrative Proceedings:** If you are involved in a court proceeding and a request is made for information about the professional services that we have provided to you and the records thereof, such information is privileged under state law, and we will not release information without the written authorization of you or your legal representative, or a subpoena of which you have been properly notified and you have failed to inform me that you are opposing the subpoena, or a court order. The privilege does not apply when you are being evaluated for a third party or where the evaluation is court ordered. You will be informed in advance if this is the case.
- **Serious Threat to Health or Safety:** we may disclose your confidential mental health information to any person without authorization if we reasonably believe that disclosure will avoid or minimize imminent danger to your health or safety, or the health or safety of any other individual.
- **Worker's Compensation:** If you file a worker's compensation claim, with certain exceptions, we must make available, at any stage of the proceedings, all mental health information in our possession relevant to that particular injury in the opinion of the Washington Department of Labor and Industries, to your employer, your representative, and the Department of Labor and Industries upon request.

IV. Patient's Rights and Company's Duties

Patient's Rights:

- *Right to Request Restrictions* –You have the right to request restrictions on certain uses and disclosures of protected health information about you. However, we are not required to agree to a restriction you request.

- *Right to Receive Confidential Communications by Alternative Means and at Alternative Locations* – You have the right to request and receive confidential communications of PHI by alternative means and at alternative locations. (For example, you may not want a family member to know that you are seeing a Senior Connections Counselor. Upon your request, we will send your bills to another address.)
- *Right to Inspect and Copy* – You have the right to inspect or obtain a copy (or both) of PHI and psychotherapy notes in our mental health and billing records used to make decisions about you for as long as the PHI is maintained in the record. We may deny your access to PHI under certain circumstances, but in some cases you may have this decision reviewed. On your request, we will discuss with you the details of the request and denial process.
- *Right to Amend* – You have the right to request an amendment of PHI for as long as the PHI is maintained in the record. We may deny your request. On your request, we will discuss with you the details of the amendment process.
- *Right to an Accounting* – You generally have the right to receive an accounting of disclosures of PHI for which you have neither provided consent nor authorization (as described in Section III of this Notice). On your request, we will discuss with you the details of the accounting process.
- *Right to a Paper Copy* – You have the right to obtain a paper copy of the notice from me upon request, even if you have agreed to receive the notice electronically.

Senior Connections' Duties:

- We are required by law to maintain the privacy of PHI and to provide you with a notice of our legal duties and privacy practices with respect to PHI.
- We reserve the right to change the privacy policies and practices described in this notice. Unless we notify you of such changes, however, we are required to abide by the terms currently in effect.

If we revise our policies and procedures, we will provide you with a revised notice in person or by United States mail.

V. Complaints

If you are concerned that we have violated your privacy rights, or you disagree with a decision we made about access to your records, you may contact **David Agnor PhD**, our Clinical Director, at 360 253-4912. You may also send a written complaint to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The person listed above can provide you with the appropriate address upon request.

VI. Effective Date, Restrictions and Changes to Privacy Policy

This notice is effective as of April 14, 2003.

We reserve the right to change the terms of this notice and to make the new notice provisions effective for all PHI that we maintain. We will provide you with a revised notice in person or by United States mail.