

NORTHEAST EAR, NOSE & THROAT CENTER, PA

Notice of Privacy Practices

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

If you have any questions about this notice, please contact our Privacy Officer.

This Notice of Privacy Practices describes how we may use and disclose your protected health information to carry out treatment, payment or health care operations and for other purposes permitted or required by law. It also describes your rights to access and control your protected health information. "Protected Health Information" is information about you including demographic information that may identify you, and relates to your past, present or future physical or mental health condition and related healthcare services.

We are required to abide by the terms of this Notice of Privacy Practices. We may change the terms of our notice at any time. The new notice will be effective for all protected health information that we maintain at that time. Upon your request, we will provide you with any revised Notice of Privacy Practices. You may call the office at 704-788-1103 to request a revised copy be mailed to you or ask for one at your appointment.

1. Uses and Disclosures of Protected Health Information

Uses and Disclosures of Protected Health Information Based Upon Your Written Consent

You will be asked by your physician to sign a consent form. Once you have consented to use and disclosure of your protected health information for treatment, payment and health care operations by signing the consent form, your physician will use and disclose your protected health information described in Section 1. Your protected health information may be used and disclosed by your physician, our office staff and others outside our office that are involved in your care and treatment for the purpose of providing health care services to you. Your protected health information may also be used and disclosed to pay your health care bills and support the operation of the physician's practice.

Following are examples of the types of uses and disclosures of your protected health information that the physician's office is permitted to make once you have signed our consent form. These are not meant to be exhaustive, but to describe the types of uses and disclosures that may be made by our office with your consent.

Treatment: We will use and disclose your protected health information to provide, coordinate or manage your health care and any related services. This includes the coordination or management of your health care and any related services or with a third party that has already obtained your permission to have access to your protected health information. For example, we would disclose your protected health information as necessary to a home health agency that provides care to you. We will also disclose protected health information to other physicians who may be treating you when we have the necessary permission from you to disclose this information. For example, your protected health information may be provided to a physician to whom you have been referred to ensure that the physician has the necessary information to diagnose or treat you. In addition, we may disclose your protected health information to another physician or health care provider (e.g., a specialist or laboratory) who, at the request of your

physician, becomes involved in your care by providing assistance with your health care diagnosis or treatment.

Payment: Your protected health information will be used, as needed, to obtain payment for your health care services. This may include information your health insurance plan may require before it approves or pays for the health care services we recommend for you such as making a determination of eligibility or coverage for insurance benefits, reviewing services provided to you for medical necessity, and undertaking utilization review activities. For example, obtaining approval for a hospital stay may require that your relevant protected health information be disclosed to the health plan to obtain approval for the hospital admission.

Healthcare Operations: We may use or disclose your protected health information in order to support the business activities of your physician's practice. These activities include, but are not limited to, quality assessment, employee review, training of medical students, licensing, marketing and fundraising, and conducting or arranging for other business activities.

For example, we may disclose your protected health information to medical school students that see patients at our office. In addition, we may use a sign-in sheet at the registration desk where you will be asked to sign your name and indicate your physician. We may also call you by name in the waiting room when your physician is ready to see you. We may use or disclose your protected health information as necessary to contact you to remind you of your appointment.

We will share your protected health information with third party "business associates" that perform various activities (e.g., billing, transcription services) for the practice. Whenever an arrangement between our office and a business associate involves the use or disclosure of your protected health information, we will have a written contract that contains terms that will protect the privacy of your protected health information.

We may use or disclose your protected health information as necessary to provide you with information about treatment alternatives or other health-related benefits and services that may be of interest to you. We may also use and disclose your protected health information for other marketing purposes. For example, your name and address may be used to send you a newsletter about our practice and the services we offer. We may also send you information about products or services that we believe may be beneficial to you. You may contact our Privacy Officer to request that these materials not be sent to you. At this time, however, NorthEast Ear, Nose & Throat Center, PA does not engage in the use of protected health information for marketing purposes.

Uses and Disclosures of Protected Health Information Based upon Your Written Authorization

Other uses and disclosure of your protected health information will be made only with your written authorization, unless otherwise permitted or required by law as described below. You may revoke this authorization at any time in writing except to the extent that your physician or the practice has taken an action in reliance on the use or disclosure indicated in the authorization.

Other Permitted and Required Uses and Disclosure That May be Made With Your Consent, Authorization or Opportunity to Object

We may use and disclose your protected health information in the following instances. You have the opportunity to agree or object to the use or disclosure of all or part of your protected health information. If you are not present or able to agree or object, then your physician may,

using professional judgment, determine whether the disclosure is in your best interest. In this case, only the protected health information that is relevant to your health care will be disclosed.

Emergencies: We may use or disclose your protected health information in an emergency treatment situation. If this happens, your physician shall try to obtain your consent as soon as reasonably practical after the delivery of your treatment. If your physician or another physician in the practice is required by law to treat you and the physician has attempted to obtain your consent but is unable to obtain your consent, he or she may still use or disclose your protected health information to treat you.

Others Involved in Your Healthcare: Unless you object, we may disclose to a member of your family, a relative, a close friend or any other person you identify, your protected health information that directly relates to a person's involvement in your health care. If you are unable to agree or object to such a disclosure, we may disclose such information as necessary if we determine that it is in your best interest based on our professional judgment. We may use or disclose protected health information to notify or assist in notifying a family member, personal representative or any other person that is responsible for the care of your location, general condition or death. Finally, we may use or disclose your protected health information to an authorized public or private entity to assist in disaster relief efforts and to coordinate uses and disclosures to family or other individuals involved in your health care.

Communication Barriers: We may use and disclose your protected health information if a physician in the practice attempts to obtain consent from you but is unable to do so due to substantial communication barriers and the physician determines, using professional judgment, that you intend to consent to use or disclose under the circumstances.

Other Permitted and Required Uses and Disclosure That May Be Made Without Your Consent, Authorization or Opportunity to Object

We may use or disclose your protected health information in the following situations without your consent or authorization. These situations include:

Required by Law: We may use or disclose your protected health information to the extent that law requires compliance and limited to the relevant requirements of the law. You will be notified, as required by law, of any such uses or disclosures.

Health Oversight: We may disclose protected health information to a health oversight agency for activities authorized by law, such as audits, investigations and inspections. Oversight agencies seeking this information include government agencies that oversee the health care system, government benefit programs, other governmental regulatory programs and civil rights laws.

Public Health: We may disclose your protected health information for public health activities and purposes to a public health authority that is permitted by law to collect or receive the information. The disclosure will be made for the purpose of controlling disease, injury or disability. We may also disclose your protected health information, if directed by the public health authority, to a foreign government agency that is collaborating with the public health authority.

Communicable Diseases: We may disclose your protected health information, if authorized by law, to a person who may have been exposed to a communicable disease or may otherwise be at risk of contracting or spreading the disease.

Abuse or Neglect: We may disclose your protected health information to a public health agency authorized by law to receive reports of child abuse or neglect. In addition, we may disclose your protected health information if we believe you have been a victim of abuse, neglect or domestic violence to the governmental entity or agency authorized to receive such information. In this case, the disclosure will be made consistent with the requirements of applicable federal and state laws.

Food and Drug Administration: We may disclose your protected health information to a person or company required by the Food and Drug Administration to report adverse events, product defects or problems, biologic product deviations, track products; to enable product recalls; to make repairs or replacements, or to conduct post marketing surveillance, as required.

Legal Proceedings: We may disclose your protected health information in the course of any judicial or administrative proceeding, in response to an order of a court or administrative tribunal (to the extent such disclosure is expressly authorized), in certain conditions in response to a subpoena, discovery request or other lawful process.

Law Enforcement: We may also disclose your protected health information, so long as applicable legal requirements are met, for law enforcement purposes. These law enforcement purposes include (1) legal processes and otherwise required by law, (2) limited information requests for identification and location purposes, (3) pertaining to victims of a crime, (4) suspicion that a death has occurred as a result of criminal conduct, (5) in the event that a crime occurs on the premises of the Practice, and (6) medical emergency (not on the Practice's premises) and it is likely that a crime has occurred.

Criminal Activity: Consistent with applicable federal and state laws, we may disclose your protected health information, if we believe that the use or disclosure is necessary to prevent or lessen a serious and imminent threat to the health or safety of a person or to the public. We may also disclose protected health information if it is necessary for law enforcement authorities to identify or apprehend an individual.

Inmates: We may use or disclose your protected health information if you are an inmate of a correctional facility and your physician created or received your protected health information in the course of providing care to you.

Military Activity and National Security: When the appropriate conditions apply, we may use or disclose protected health information of individuals who are Armed Forces personnel (1) for activities deemed necessary by appropriate military command authorities; (2) for the purpose of a determination by the Dept of Veterans Affairs of your eligibility benefits, or (3) to foreign military authority if you are a member of that foreign military service. We may also disclose your protected health information to authorized federal officials for conducting national security activities, including the provision of protective services to the President or others legally authorized.

Worker's Compensation: Your protected health information may be disclosed by us as authorized to comply with Worker's Compensation laws and other similar legally established programs.

Coroners, Funeral Directors and Organ Donation: We may disclose protected health information to a coroner or medical examiner for identification purposes, determining cause of death or for the coroner or medical examiner to perform other duties authorized by law. We may also disclose protected health information to a funeral director, as authorized by law, in order for the funeral director to carry out their duties. We may disclose such information in a reasonable anticipation

of death. Protected health information may be used and disclosed for cadaveric organ, eye or tissue donation purposes.

Research: We may disclose your protected health information to researchers when approved by an institutional review board that has reviewed the research proposal and established protocols to ensure the privacy of your protected health information.

Required Uses and Disclosures: Under the law, we must make disclosure to you and when required by the Secretary of the Dept of Health & Human Services to investigate or determine our compliance with the requirements of Section 164.500 et.seq.

2. Your Rights

Following is a statement of your rights with respect to your protected health information and a brief description of how you may exercise these rights.

You have the right to inspect and copy your protected health information. You may inspect and obtain a copy of your protected health information that is contained in a designated record set for as long as we maintain the protected health information. A "designated record set" contains medical and billing records and any other records that your physician or practice uses for making decisions about you.

Under federal law, however, you may not inspect or copy the following records: psychotherapy notes, information compiled in reasonable anticipation of, or use in, a civil, criminal, or administrative action or proceeding, and protected health information that is subject to law that prohibits access to protected health information. Depending on the circumstances, a decision to deny access may be reviewable. Please contact our Privacy Officer if you have questions about access to your medical record.

You have the right to request a restriction of your protected health information. You may ask us not to use or disclose any part of your protected health information for purposes of treatment, payment or healthcare operations, not to disclose information to family members or friends who may be involved in your care, or for notification purposes as described in this Notice of Privacy Practices. Your request must state the specific restriction requested and to whom you want the restriction to apply.

Your physician is not required to agree to a restriction that you may request. If a physician believes it is in your best interest to permit use and disclosure of your protected health information, your protected health information will not be restricted. If your physician does not agree to your requested restriction, we may not use or disclose your protected health information in violation of that restriction unless it is needed to provide emergency treatment. With this in mind, please discuss any restriction you wish to request with your physician. You may request a restriction by:

- Contacting our Privacy Officer to request a specific protected health information restriction;
- Completing any necessary and appropriate documentation of the requested restriction of protected health information; and
- Returning all necessary and appropriate documentation of the requested specific protected health information restriction to our Privacy Officer.

You may have the right to have your physician amend your protected health information. This means you may request an amendment of your protected health information in a designated record set for as long as we maintain the information. In certain cases, we may deny your

request for an amendment whereas you have the right to file a statement of disagreement with us. We may prepare a rebuttal to your statement and provide you with a copy. Contact our Privacy Officer to determine if you have questions about amending your medical record.

You have the right to request to receive confidential communications from us by alternative means or at an alternative location. We will accommodate reasonable requests as defined for this purpose as being related to normal and customary business proceedings. NorthEast Ear, Nose & Throat Center, PA will alert a patient to an unreasonable request. We may also condition this accommodation by asking for information as to how your payment will be handled or specification of an alternate address or other method of contact. We will not request an explanation from you as to the basis for the request. Please make this request in writing to our Privacy Officer.

You have the right to receive an accounting of certain disclosures we have made, if any, of your protected health information. This right applies to disclosures for purposes other than treatment, payment or healthcare operations as described in this Notice of Privacy Practices. It excludes disclosures we may have made to you, for a facility directory, to family members or friends involved in your care, or notification purposes. You have the right to receive specific information regarding these disclosures that occurred after April 14, 2003. You may request a shorter timeframe. The right to receive this information is subject to certain exceptions, restrictions and limitations.

You have the right to obtain a paper copy of this notice from us, upon request, even if you have agreed to accept this notice electronically.

3. Complaints

You may complain to NorthEast Ear, Nose & Throat Center, PA or to the Secretary of Health and Human Services if you believe your privacy has been violated. We will not retaliate against you for filing a complaint. Your complaint must be submitted in writing no later than 180 days from the perception of a violation related to your protected health information.

To file a complaint to the Secretary of Health and Human Services, use the following address:
Office of the Secretary
US Dept of Health & Human Services
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20201
To contact the Region IV Office of the Health and Human Services Office of Civil Rights, call: 404-562-7886.

You may contact our Privacy Officer at 704-788-1103 to discuss any perceived violation of your protected health information.

This notice was published and becomes effective on March 30, 2003.