

1250 E US HWY 36
Tuscola, IL 61953



DoCo Health Center
Effective Date: January 25, 2023

P: 217.253.4137
F: 217.599.3854

Douglas County Health Center

Notice of Privacy Practices

This Notice of Privacy Practices describes
how information about patients/clients may be
used and disclosed; how patients/clients may access the
information included in this notice.

Please review it carefully.

If there are questions about this Notice, please contact DCHC at 217.253.4137.



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Who Will Follow This Notice

This “Notice of Privacy Practices” (Notice) describes the privacy practices of the Douglas County Health Center (DCHC) and those of:

- Any health care professional authorized to enter information into a patient/client chart
- All divisions and units of DCHC and the operations to which DCHC outsources including certain business partners, as well as their business associates
- All DCHC workforce, employed or otherwise.

All these entities, sites and locations follow the terms of this Notice. In addition, these entities, sites and locations may share medical information with each other for treatment, payment or operations purposes described in this Notice.

Our Pledge Regarding Medical Information

DCHC understands medical information about patient(s)/client(s) and their health is personal. DCHC staff are committed to protecting medical information about patient(s)/client(s). DCHC staff create records of care and services the patient(s)/client(s) receive at DCHC facilities. DCHC needs these records to provide patient(s)/client(s) with quality care and comply with certain legal requirements. This Notice applies to all the records of patient/client care generated by DCHC. Hospitals or other physicians may have different policies or notices regarding the use and disclosure of medical information necessary for their purposes.

This Notice will explain ways in which DCHC may use and disclose medical information about patient(s)/client(s). The Notice also describes patient/client rights and certain obligations DCHC has regarding the use and disclosure of medical information.

DCHC staff is required by law to:

- ensure medical information identifying patient(s)/client(s) maintains confidentiality;
- make available to patient(s)/client(s) this Notice of their legal duties and privacy practices with respect to medical information;
- follow the terms of the Notice currently in effect. This Notice may change in the manner as described below under “Changes To This Notice.”

The following categories describe different ways that DCHC use and disclose patient(s)/client(s)’ medical information (also known as Individually Identifiable Health Information (IIHI) and/or Protected Health Information (PHI)). For each category of use or disclosure, DCHC provides examples, but not every use or disclosure in a category is listed. However, all of the ways DCHC is permitted to use and disclose information will fall within one of the categories.

For Treatment

DCHC may use medical information about patient(s)/client(s) to provide them with medical/behavioral health treatment and/or services. DCHC may disclose medical information about patient(s)/client(s) to doctors, nurses, technicians, medical students, or other healthcare personnel involved in taking care of mutual patient(s)/client(s). For example, DCHC may forward records to a specialist to assure patient(s)/client(s) receive proper care. Also, if patient(s)/client(s) are referred to DCHC by another healthcare provider, it is likely DCHC will report back to the referring provider with information about diagnosis and plan for treatment unless the patient/client has advised DCHC otherwise, in writing.

DCHC may disclose medical information about patient(s)/client(s) to individuals outside the DCHC who may be involved in patient(s)/client(s)’ healthcare, such as family members, close friends, clergy or other DCHC employees to provide services as a part of their care. For instance, DCHC may receive calls from concerned family members or close friends to determine if a patient/client has completed their appointment. Unless the patient/client has advised DCHC otherwise (in writing), DCHC may let the inquiring individual know of the patient/client’s current status with the DCHC office. In addition, it may be necessary for DCHC staff to reach patient(s)/client(s) via telephone regarding an upcoming appointment. Unless otherwise notified by patient(s)/client(s) in writing, DCHC will contact patient(s)/client(s) using telephone numbers previously provided. DCHC may leave voicemail message(s) for patient(s)/client(s). DCHC may need to contact patient(s)/client(s) by other methods, including text message, social media messaging, and/or email, unless otherwise notified by patient(s)/client(s) in writing. In certain circumstances, caregivers from nursing homes, assisted living centers, etc. can bring patient(s)/client(s) to DCHC. Often these caregivers are exposed to patient(s)/client(s)’ personal health information.



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For Payment

DCHC may use and disclose medical information about patient(s)/client(s) so treatment and services received from DCHC may be billed to and collected from patient(s)/client(s), an insurance company, health plan or other third-party. For example, DCHC may need to give patient(s)/client(s)' health plan specific information about treatment received in the office so their health plan will pay DCHC or reimburse the patient/client for treatment/service. In addition, DCHC or DCHC representatives, may discuss payment issues with family members or others involved in the process of paying for medical treatment received. DCHC may tell a health plan about a treatment patient(s)/client(s) will receive to obtain prior approval or to determine whether the insurance plan will cover treatment. DCHC may have bills and payment arrangements outsourced to one or more third-party service providers, who issue, process and may collect bills on DCHC's behalf. Each of these entities is governed by the same health care information disclosure and confidentiality laws DCHC must follow.

For Health Care Operations

DCHC may use and disclose medical information about patient(s)/client(s) for DCHC operations. These uses and disclosures are necessary to run DCHC and ensure all patient(s)/client(s) receive quality care. For example, DCHC may use medical information to review treatment, services, and evaluate performance of staff caring for patient(s)/client(s). DCHC may also combine medical information about many patient(s)/client(s) to decide what additional services should be offered, services which may not be necessary, and whether certain treatments are effective. DCHC may disclose information to doctors, nurses, technologists, healthcare students, health professionals, and other members of DCHC staff for review and learning purposes.

Treatment Alternatives

DCHC may use and disclose medical information to tell patient(s)/client(s) about health-related benefits or services which may be of interest.

Business Associates

On occasion, DCHC may use outside organizations to provide business services. Business associates may be exposed to patient(s)/client(s)' health information and are required to comply with all the same HIPAA administrative, physical, and technical safeguard requirements applied to DCHC. Also, if the business associate contracts with a third-party, the third-party entity must comply with all HIPAA rules.

As Required By Law

DCHC will disclose medical information about patient(s)/client(s) when required to do so by federal, state or local law:

- **To Avert A Serious Threat To Health Or Safety**

DCHC may use and disclose medical information about patient(s)/client(s) when necessary to prevent a serious threat to their health and safety, or the health and safety of the public, or another person. Any disclosure, however, would only be to someone able to help prevent the threat.

- **Special Situations**

DCHC may also use and disclose medical information about patient(s)/client(s) in the situations described under "Special Situations," below.

- **Other Uses Of Medical Information**

Other uses and disclosures of medical information not covered by this Notice, or the laws that apply to us, will be made only with patient(s)/client(s) written authorization. A form for such authorizations, both those that patient(s)/client(s) request and those that DCHC requests, is available from the DCHC office. If patient(s)/client(s) give DCHC authorization, patient(s)/client(s) may later revoke permission in writing at any time. If patient(s)/client(s) revoke their permission, DCHC will no longer use or disclose medical information about patient(s)/client(s) for the reasons covered by their written authorization. In that case, however, DCHC will be unable to take back any disclosures DCHC have already made with their permission, and DCHC will still be required to retain DCHC records of the care that DCHC provided to patient(s)/client(s).

- **Special Situations** (*Including but not limited to...*)

- **Military and Veterans**

If patient(s)/client(s) are member(s) of the armed forces, DCHC may release medical information about them as required by military command authorities, or in some cases, if needed to determine benefits to the Department of Veterans Affairs.



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○ **Public Health Risks**

DCHC may disclose medical information about patient(s)/client(s) for public health activities. These activities generally include the following:

- to prevent or control disease, injury or disability;
- to report births and deaths;
- to report child abuse or neglect;
- to report reactions to medications or problems with products;
- to notify people of recalls of products they may be using;
- to notify a person who may have been exposed to a disease or may be at risk for contracting or spreading a disease or condition; and/or
- to notify the appropriate government authority if DCHC believes a patient has been the victim of abuse, neglect or domestic violence. **DCHC will only make this disclosure when required or authorized by law.**

Health Oversight Activities

DCHC may disclose medical information to a health oversight agency for activities authorized by law. These oversight activities include, for example, audits, investigations, inspections, and licensure. These activities are necessary for the government to monitor the health care system, government programs, and compliance with civil rights laws.

Outside Use

It is a violation of DCHC policy to use patient PHI for marketing, research or to sell PHI in any way. Under no circumstances will DCHC engage in these activities.

Fundraising

It is a violation of DCHC policy to use patient PHI for fundraising purposes. DCHC will not contact patients to conduct fundraising activities using PHI as a source of identification.

Lawsuits and Disputes

If patient(s)/client(s) are involved in a lawsuit or a dispute, DCHC may disclose medical information about them in response to a court or administrative order. DCHC may also disclose medical information about patient(s)/client(s) in response to a subpoena, discovery request, or other lawful process by someone else involved in the dispute, but only if efforts have been made to tell them about the request or to obtain an order protecting the information requested.

Law Enforcement

DCHC may release medical information if asked to do so by a law enforcement official:

- in response to a court order, subpoena, warrant, summons or similar process;
- to identify or locate a suspect, fugitive, material witness, or missing person;
- about the victim of a crime if, under certain limited circumstances, DCHC are unable to obtain the person's agreement;
- about a death DCHC believe may be the result of criminal conduct;
- about criminal conduct at DCHC practice; and
- in emergency circumstances to report a crime; the location of the crime or victims; or the identity, description or location of the person who committed the crime.

Coroners, Medical Examiners and Funeral Directors

DCHC may release medical information to a coroner or medical examiner. This may be necessary, for example, to identify a deceased person or determine the cause of death.

Decedents

A decedent's PHI is protected for 50 years after the individual's death. After this timeframe, the information is no longer considered PHI.

National Security, Intelligence and Federal Protective Service Activities

DCHC may release medical information about patient(s)/client(s) to authorized federal officials for intelligence, counterintelligence, and other national security activities authorized by law, and to authorized federal officials where required to provide protection to the President of the United States, other authorized persons or foreign heads of state or conduct special investigations.



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Inmates

If patient(s)/client(s) are an inmate of a correctional institution or under the custody of a law enforcement official, DCHC may release medical information about them to the correctional institution or law enforcement official where necessary for the institution to provide them with healthcare; to protect their health and safety or the health and safety of others; or for the safety and security of the correctional institution.

Patient/Client Rights Regarding Medical Information About Themselves

Patient(s)/client(s) have the following rights regarding medical information DCHC maintain about themselves:

- **Right to Inspect and Copy**

Patient(s)/client(s) have the right to inspect and request a copy of medical information that may be used to make decisions about their care. Usually, this includes medical and billing records, but does not include psychotherapy notes.

Patient(s)/client(s) may request an electronic copy of their PHI that is maintained electronically. DCHC will provide an electronic copy in the form requested, if readily producible, or if not, in a readable electronic form and format as agreed by patient(s)/client(s) and DCHC.

Patient(s)/client(s) must submit any request to inspect and copy their medical records to DCHC staff, in writing. (A form for that request is available from the DCHC office.) If patient(s)/client(s) request a copy of their information, DCHC will charge a fee of \$0.25 per copy for the costs of copying, mailing or other supplies associated with the request.

DCHC may deny the request in certain very limited circumstances. If patient(s)/client(s) are denied access to medical information, patient(s)/client(s) may request that the denial be reviewed. Another healthcare professional chosen by DCHC staff will review their request and the denial. The person conducting the review will not be the person who denied their request. DCHC will comply with the outcome of that review.

- **Right to Amend**

If patient(s)/client(s) feel that medical information DCHC has about patient(s)/client(s) is incorrect or incomplete, patient(s)/client(s) may ask DCHC to amend the information. Patient(s)/client(s) have the right to request an amendment for as long as the information is kept by or for DCHC. Patient(s)/client(s) must submit any request for an amendment to DCHC staff, in writing via a form for that request that is available from the DCHC office. Patient(s)/client(s)' written request must provide a reason supporting their request.

DCHC may deny their request for an amendment if it is not in writing, or does not include a reason to support the request. In addition, DCHC may deny their request if patient(s)/client(s) ask DCHC to amend information that:

- was not created by DCHC, unless the person or entity that created the information is no longer available to make the amendment;
- is not part of the medical information kept by or for DCHC;
- is not part of the information which patient(s)/client(s) are permitted to inspect and copy; or
- is accurate and complete.

Right to an Accounting of Disclosures

Patient(s)/client(s) have the right to request an "accounting of disclosures." This is a list of the disclosures DCHC have made of medical information about patient(s)/client(s), with some exceptions. The exceptions are governed by federal health privacy law, and may include:

- many routine disclosures for treatment, payment and operations; and
- disclosures to patient(s)/client(s).

Patient(s)/client(s) must submit any request for an accounting of disclosures to the DCHC office, in writing via a form for that request that is available from the DCHC office. Patient(s)/client(s)' written request must state a time period which may not be longer than six years. The first report patient(s)/client(s) request within a 12-month period will be free. For additional reports, DCHC may charge patient(s)/client(s) for the costs of providing the report. DCHC will notify patient(s)/client(s) of the cost involved, and patient(s)/client(s) may choose to withdraw or modify their request at that time before any costs are incurred.



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Right to Request Restrictions

Patient(s)/client(s) have the right to request a restriction or limitation on the medical information DCHC uses or disclose about patient(s)/client(s) for treatment, payment or healthcare operations. Patient(s)/client(s) also have the right to request a limit on the medical information DCHC disclose about patient(s)/client(s) to someone who may be involved in their care or the payment for their care, like a family member or friend. For example, patient(s)/client(s) could request DCHC not use or disclose information about a medical service patient(s)/client(s) receive. Also, patient(s)/client(s) have the right to designate a personal representative who will then have the ability to access their personal health information, just as patient(s)/client(s) do. Patient(s)/client(s) may also request DCHC to be selective in the way DCHC communicates personal health information to patient(s)/client(s). For example, patient(s)/client(s) may request that DCHC not contact patient(s)/client(s) by telephone at their office or patient(s)/client(s) may designate a mailing address other than their home. Such requests must be made in writing via a form for such requests that is available from the DCHC office. Please note DCHC is not required to agree to patient/client requests. However, if DCHC does agree, DCHC will comply with the request unless information is needed to provide patient(s)/client(s) emergency treatment.

Patient(s)/client(s) have the right to restrict the disclosure of PHI (for payment or health care operations) to a health plan when patient(s)/client(s) pay out-of-pocket, in full, and request such a restriction. DCHC must honor such a request unless otherwise required by law. This restriction does not apply to follow-up visits if they are not paid for in full out of pocket.

Patient(s)/client(s) must submit any request for restrictions to DCHC staff, in writing via a form for each request that is available from the DCHC office. The written request must tell DCHC:

- what information patient(s)/client(s) want to limit;
- whether patient(s)/client(s) want to limit DCHC use, disclosure or both; and
- to whom patient(s)/client(s) want the limits to apply, for example, disclosures to their spouse.

Right to a Paper Copy of This Notice

Patient(s)/client(s) may request DCHC to give patient(s)/client(s) a paper copy of this "Notice of Privacy Practices" at any time by contacting the DCHC office.

Right to Receive a Breach Notice

Should DCHC experience an impermissible use or disclosure of PHI and that exposure poses a significant risk of financial, reputational, or other harm to an individual, DCHC will provide individual notice to person(s) affected by the breach.

Complaints

If patient(s)/client(s) believe their privacy rights have been violated, patient(s)/client(s) may file a complaint with the DCHC office by contacting DCHC Chief Privacy Officer or with the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services. To file a complaint with the DCHC office, please contact Douglas County Health Department's **Chief Privacy Officer**, 1250 E. US Highway 36, Tuscola, Illinois 61953 or by calling 217-253-4137. (Complaint forms are available at the DCHC office.)

Patient(s)/client(s) will not be penalized for filing a complaint.

DCHC's Right to Make Changes to This Notice

DCHC reserves the right to change this Notice. When DCHC does, DCHC may make the changed Notice effective for medical information DCHC already has about patient(s)/client(s), as well as information DCHC receives in the future. DCHC will post a copy of the current Notice in DCHC facilities. Each Notice will contain on the first page, in the top right-hand corner, its effective date. Also, each time a patient(s)/client(s) register at DCHC office for medical services, a copy of the current Notice in effect will be available to patient(s)/client(s) in the waiting area.