



# COMMUNITY HEALTH SERVICES GUIDELINE

## TEXTING WITH INDIVIDUALS RECEIVING HEALTH CARE SERVICES FROM WRHA

### **PURPOSE:**

The purpose of this guideline is to provide direction related to when texting may be used to communicate with an individual who is receiving health care services within the region.

Texting should not be used as a first means of communication or as a matter of course where other more secure options exist.

When texting is the only option available, it should never contain personal health information.

In some circumstances it may be helpful for health care providers to explicitly discuss the obligations of WRHA employees to protect privacy and the limitations they have in sending or responding to text messages before problematic texts are received by them.

### **BEFORE YOU SEND A TEXT YOU MUST:**

1. Determine whether another more secure method of communication is available or practicable to use.
2. Confirm that the number you have to contact the individual/client/resident is the correct number.
  - Phone numbers for individual's can be stored in an employee's ***business*** phone, however only initials or first name and initial of last name should be used to identify the person. (E.G. Sally S) Phone numbers of individuals receiving health care should ***never*** be stored in an employee's ***personal*** cell phone.
  - Text communication should be deleted at minimum daily.

### **WHEN SENDING A TEXT IS YOUR ONLY OPTION YOU MUST:**

1. Text only the ***minimum amount*** of information necessary to accomplish your purpose for texting. (E. G. "I am here, please let me in" or "your appointment has been changed to XXpm" or "I am running late and will be about 20 minutes late")
2. Never include personal health information in any text message to individuals receiving health care.
3. Information about the reason for the appointment or visit should never be included in a text message.
4. If it is necessary to identify yourself via text and where that information may identify the health services and the nature of the services provided, the minimum amount of information necessary must be used (e.g. first name only).

### **WHEN YOU RECEIVE A TEXT FROM SOMEONE YOU ARE PROVIDING SERVICES TO:**

1. If the text received is from an individual wanting to discuss their services or health care issue, advise that "We are unable to communicate by text and will discuss their concerns during the next appointment, visit or phone call."
2. If the text received is to change an appointment, you can respond with a new date and time but no information about the appointment or visit should be included.