



**Lindsey Lodge Hospice**

**EMAIL USE POLICY**

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## 1 Scope

The purpose of the e-mail policy is to ensure the appropriate and effective use of e-mail on the Care Plus Group (CPG provide IT services to Lindsey Lodge Hospice) systems by:

- Setting out the rules governing the sending, receiving and storing of e-mail.
- Establishing Lindsey Lodge Hospice and user rights and responsibilities for the use of the system.
- Promoting adherence to current legal requirements and NHS information governance standards.

This e-mail policy applies to the following areas:

- The use of NHS e-mail accounts.

## 2 Introduction

E-mail is an increasingly popular form of communication. It can be of great benefit to the organisation when used appropriately but its use also exposes Lindsey Lodge Hospice to new risks. These include non-compliance with various statutory requirements for example, data protection legislation, threats to IT security and ineffective communication.

## 3 Definitions

For the purposes of this policy, e-mail includes the e-mail accessed via NHS Mail.

## 4 Roles & Responsibilities

Failure to comply with this policy and procedures may have serious consequences for the individual including civil, criminal and/or action being taken in accordance with the Lindsey Lodge Hospice disciplinary procedure.

## 5 The Procedure

### 5.1 Confidentiality

Confidential, sensitive and Patient identifiable information should only be sent via email when absolutely necessary. The NHS mail service is a secure service, this means that NHS mail is authorised for sending sensitive information, such as clinical data, between NHS mail and:

- NHS mail addresses (i.e. from an '\*.nhs.net' account to an '\*.nhs.net' account)
- Government secure email domains (between \*.nhs.net and \*.gsi.gov.uk, \*.gse.gov.uk and \*.gsx.gov.uk)
- Police National Network/Criminal Justice Services secure email domains (between \*.nhs.net and \*.pnn.police.uk, \*.scn.gov.uk, \*.cjsm.net)
- Ministry of Defence secure email domains (\*.nhs.net and \*.mod.uk)
- Local Government/Social Services secure email domains (\*.nhs.net and \*.gcsx.gov.uk)

Only send emails to approved addresses. It is not permitted to send confidential information to free web based e-mail services such as Hotmail, Gmail, Yahoo etc.

If you intend to use the service to exchange sensitive information you should adhere to the following guidelines:

- You should make sure that any exchange of sensitive information is part of an agreed process. This means that both those sending and receiving the information know what is to be sent, what it is for and have agreed how the information will be treated.
- Caldicott and local Information Governance principles should apply whenever sensitive information is exchanged.
- As with printed information, care should be taken that sensitive or personal information is not left anywhere that it can be accessed by other people, e.g. on a public computer without password protection.
- When you are sending sensitive information you should always request a delivery and read receipt so that you can be sure the information has been received safely. This is especially important for time-sensitive information.
- You must not hold sensitive or personal data in your calendar if your calendar may be accessed by other people who are not involved in the care of that person.
- If personal identifiable information is visible to other people it is your responsibility to make sure that those people have a valid relationship with the person.
- You must always be sure that you have the correct contact details for the person (or group) that you are sending the information to. This is especially important if you are sending information using the fax or SMS services. If in doubt you should check the contact details in the NHS Directory.
- If it is likely that you may be sent personal and/or sensitive information you must make sure that the data is protected. You should only access your account from secure, encrypted devices which are password protected and unattended devices must be locked to ensure that data is protected in the event of the device being lost or stolen.
- Remember that personal information is accessible to the data subject i.e. the patient, under Data Protection legislation.
- Where practical remove identifiers such as client/patient name, date of birth etc., and phone the recipient with key to identification.
- Use only the minimum necessary information think about previous information contained in the 'email chain'; do not repeat this information unless needed.
- Mark the email subject heading as 'personal information'. You may wish to add a number/code to aid your tracking of emails and replies. Do not use the patients/client's name in the subject heading.
- When replying to an email containing personal information, do not use the 'reply all' button unless absolutely necessary.
- Where the client/patient is identified in the email (sent or received emails) save in the client/patient personal record (both manual and electronic records) and delete emails from your system at the earliest opportunity.
- Include a disclaimer, as detailed in section 5.3.

- Ensure that plans are in place for your emails to be dealt with in your absence. However note that the use of the auto-forward facility is not allowed without the specific authority of IT Head of Service, and will never be permitted to free web mail services.
- If you receive an email in breach of this guidance follow your local incident reporting system as detailed in the Data Protection Management Policy.

## 5.2 Monitoring

Staff are advised that in accordance with the Employment Practices Data protection Code monitoring of E-mail traffic will take place subject to the following guidance:

- Monitoring is required to ensure that employees do not breach any regulations (such as those on harassment and discrimination) which could have a legal impact on Lindsey Lodge Hospice.
- Spot checks will be done as opposed to continuous monitoring.
- Traffic will be monitored as opposed to content unless there are reasons for checking specific e-mails.

Inappropriate use of the e-mail may result in the facility being withdrawn and may lead to action being taken in accordance with the Lindsey Lodge Hospice disciplinary procedure.

## 5.3 Disclaimers

Messages of a confidential nature should include the following disclaimer:

*The contents of this email are not necessarily the policy or opinion of Lindsey Lodge Hospice or any person employed by it. This transmission is intended only for the named recipient(s) and is confidential in nature. If received in error, please return it to the sender and destroy any copies immediately.*

## 5.4 Bandwidth

This is the term that is used to describe the amount of information that can be transmitted on a network over a given time. Individual users sending very large files such as videos if sending to large numbers of addressees can have an adverse effect on the availability of the network for other users. To avoid this, users should be aware of the problem and where possible avoid sending large e-mails with attachments. Text should be included in the body of the message as opposed to attaching a Word document, and where a file can be located on the network or Intranet the location should be given rather than copying the file. This is particularly important for multiple addresses.

## 5.5 Mailbox Size

Due to the number of users on the system, it is a key requirement that users have a set limit set in terms of the size of their mailbox. These limits may change over time subject to technical storage issues. Users will receive a notification when their mailbox is reaching the limit. A further message will be sent when the mailbox reached the limit and at this point users may be blocked from sending any further items until they reduce the size of their mailbox. This can be done either by deleting items no longer required or archiving folders onto the network storage.

## 6 Inappropriate Use of E-mail

The use of e-mail in the following types of activities is specifically prohibited:

- Illegal, fraudulent, or malicious activities.
- Partisan political activity, political or religious lobbying.
- Advocacy or activities on behalf of organisations having no connection with Lindsey Lodge Hospice
- Activities whose purposes are for personal or commercial financial gain. These activities may include chain letters, solicitations of business or services, sales of personal property.
- Unauthorised fund-raising or similar activities, whether for commercial, personal or charitable purposes.
- Distributing offensive or obscene material such as pornography and hate literature.
- Annoying or harassing another person, e.g. by sending or displaying uninvited e-mail of a personal nature; joke emails or by using lewd or offensive language in an e-mail message.
- Using another person's account or identity without his or her explicit permission, e.g. by forging e-mail.
- Viewing, damaging, or deleting files or communications belonging to others without appropriate authorisation or permission.
- Attempting to circumvent or defeat security or auditing systems without prior authorisation and other than as part of legitimate system testing or security research.
- Activities which may bring Lindsey Lodge Hospice into disrepute.

These, and other inappropriate activities, may result in action being taken in accordance with the Lindsey Lodge Hospice disciplinary procedure against the person found misusing the e-mail service for such purposes.

### **6.1 Management of E-mail**

There is a common misconception that email messages constitute an impermanent form of communication. This misconception about how email messages can be used could result in legal action being taken against Lindsey Lodge Hospice or individuals. All email messages are subject to Data Protection Legislation and can also form part of the corporate record.

Staff should also be aware that email messages could be used as evidence in legal proceedings.

There may be occasions when it is necessary to access email messages from an individual's mailbox when a person is away from the office for an extended period, for example holiday or sickness. Users should be aware that e-mail accounts can be accessed if an organisational need is determined. The reasons for accessing an individual's mailbox are to action:

- Subject access request under the Data Protection Act.
- Evidence in legal proceedings.
- Evidence in a criminal investigation.
- Line of business enquiry.
- Evidence in support of disciplinary action.

Where it is not possible to ask the permission from the member of staff whose mailbox needs to be accessed, the procedure for gaining access their mailbox is:

- Gain authorisation from the Chief Executive.

- Submit a request to Care Plus Group IT Support Desk on 01472 256789.
- Request must be authorised by the individual`s line manager.
- A record is made of the reasons for accessing the mailbox together with the names of the people who were present.
- Inform the person whose mailbox was accessed at the earliest opportunity.

It is less likely that this procedure will need to be followed if email records are managed appropriately or mailbox access has been delegated to a trusted third party.

## 6.2 Records Management

Email messages can constitute part of the formal record of a transaction, decision or communication about an issue. All members of staff are responsible for identifying and managing emails messages that constitute a record of their work. When an email is sent or received a decision needs to be made about whether the email needs to be captured as a record. Once an email message has been captured as a record it should be deleted from the email client. The main points to consider when managing email records are:

- Identifying email records.
- Who is responsible for capturing email records.
- Email messages with attachments.
- When to capture email records.
- Where to capture email records.
- Titling email records.

## 6.3 E-mail Messages with Attachments

Where an email message has an attachment a decision needs to be made as to whether the email message, the attachment or both should be kept as a record. The decision on whether an email and/or its attachment constitute a record depends on the context within which they were received. It is likely that in most circumstances the attachment should be captured as a record with the email message as the email message will provide the context within which the attachment was used. There are instances where the email attachment might require further work, in which case it would be acceptable to capture the email message and the attachment together as a record and keep a copy of the attachment in another location to be worked on. In these circumstances the copy attachment that was used for further work will become a completely separate record.

**When to capture:** Email messages that can be considered to be records should be captured as soon as possible. Most email messages will form part of an email conversation string. Where an email string has formed as part of a discussion it is not necessary to capture each new part of the conversation, ie every reply, separately. There is no need to wait until the end of the conversation before capturing the email string as several subjects might have been covered. Email strings should be captured as records at significant points during the conversation, rather than waiting to the end of the conversation because it might not be apparent when the conversation has finished.

**Where to capture:** Email messages that constitute records must be either printed to paper or saved on shared drives. Email messages captured as records should be located with other records relating to the same business activity. NHS mailboxes should not be used for long-term storage of email messages. When emails are no longer required they should be deleted.

**Storage.** Once captured and stored the e-mail becomes subject to the same policy for records retention as any other record.

#### **6.4 Good Practice and Effective Use of Email**

The following guidelines have been included into this policy document to provide assistance to users in the effective use of Email services.

##### **Subject Line.**

- Ensure the subject line gives a clear indication of the content of the message.
- Indicate if the subject matter is sensitive.
- Use flags to indicate whether the message is of high or low importance and the speed with which an action is required.
- Indicate whether an action is required or whether the email is for information only.

##### **Subject and Tone.**

- Greet people by name at the beginning of an email message.
- Identify yourself at the beginning of the message when contacting someone for the first time.
- Ensure that the purpose and content of the email message is clearly explained.
- Include a signature with your own contact details.
- Ensure that the email is polite and courteous and appropriately worded.
- Tone of an email message should match the intended outcome.

##### **Make a clear distinction between fact and opinion**

- Proof read messages before they are sent to check for errors.
- Try to limit email messages to one subject per message.
- Include the original email message when sending a reply to provide a context.
- Where the subject of a string of email messages has significantly changed start new email message, copying relevant sections from the previous string of email messages.
- Ensure email messages are not unnecessarily long.
- Ensure that attachments are not longer versions of emails.
- Summarise the content of attachments in the main body of the email message.

##### **Structure and Grammar**

- Try to use plain English.
- Check the spelling within the email message before sending.
- Use paragraphs to structure information.
- Put important information at the beginning of the email message.
- Take care when using abbreviations.
- Avoid using CAPITALS.
- Try not to over-use bold and coloured text.

##### **Addressing**

- Distribute email message only to the people who need to know the information.
- Using 'reply all' will send the reply to everyone included in the original email. Think carefully before using 'reply all' as it is unlikely that everyone included will need to know your reply.
- Use the 'To' field for people who are required to take further action and the 'cc' field for people who are included for information only.
- Think carefully about who should be included in the 'cc' field.



- Ensure the email message is correctly addressed.

#### General

- Be aware that different computer systems will affect the layout of an email message.
- Be aware that some computer systems might have difficulties with attachments.
- Internal emails should use pointers to attachments and information held on shared drives or the Intranet.

#### 7 Associated Policies

- *Acceptable Internet Use Policy*
- *Records management Policy*
- *Information Security Policy*

#### 8 Consultation

IT & IG committee

#### 9 Dissemination

Via Lindsey Lodge `L` drive policies/guidelines of this form.

#### 10 Equality Act

10.1 In accordance with the Equality Act (2010), the Hospice will make reasonable adjustments in the workplace so that an employee with a disability, as covered under the Act, should not be at any substantial disadvantage. The Hospice will endeavour to develop an environment within which individuals feel able to disclose any disability or concern which may have a long term ad substantial effect on their ability to carry out their normal day to day activities.

10.2 The Hospice will wherever practical make adjustments as deemed reasonable in light of an employee’s specific circumstances and the Hospice’s available resources paying particular attention to the Disability Discrimination requirements and the Equality Act (2010)

REFERENCES: Care Plus Group				
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Responsible Sub-group IT & IG committee				
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