LETTER TO FAMILIES:
the Communication Process

WE APPRECIATE THAT you are likely very concerned about how your loved one is doing while with us at SCHC. We know that many family members are eager to speak with the counsellors, physician, psychiatrist, nurses, and other staff.

THIS LETTER WILL HELP YOU UNDERSTAND:

1. What communication you can expect from SCHC staff
2. What types of information are protected.

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT

- **Our Family Services Coordinators will email you** a Family Resources package that outlines the family services and resources available to you.
- **If you're interested in attending one of our Virtual Family Sessions,** you can register using the link provided in the Family Resources email. You can also reach out to our Family Services Coordinators who can assist you with registering.
- **The Family Services Coordinators can address questions and concerns** you have throughout the treatment period. They will update your loved one's care team on any concerns you may have.
- **To speak with our Family Services Coordinators**, email familyservices@schc.ca or phone 604-487-9050 ext. 205.

UNDERSTANDING WHY SCHC/GSWC FOLLOWS THIS COMMUNICATION PROCESS

SCHC/GSWC's clinical and medical staff members must follow the laws and policies of the Government of British Columbia, healthcare codes of ethics, and the professional associations to which they belong. Among all of these regulations and guidelines are strict rules about who is and who is not entitled to a client's protected personal information.

PROTECTED PERSONAL INFORMATION

Some examples of protected personal information of clients who seek professional healthcare include:

1. Physical and psychiatric diagnoses
2. Medications prescribed (if applicable)
3. Reports and clinical notes
4. Recommendations for further testing
5. Disclosures in assessments or therapy, and
6. Certain details in the therapeutic process.

According to these laws, codes of ethics, and policies, even the funder is not entitled to a client's protected personal information.

Of course, there may be times when it is important for families to have a better understanding of their loved one's condition. For example, perhaps the clinical team discovers a client has dementia and needs help making decisions. In this case, we decide if it's in the client's best interest to inform a family member of the new diagnosis. Cases like this are exceptional.

OBLIGATIONS OF PRIMARY COUNSELLOR

Your loved one's primary counsellor at SCHC will develop what we call a "therapeutic relationship" with the client. This relationship is so important in psychotherapy that it is also protected by the laws of British Columbia and by the healthcare code of ethics. The purpose of protecting the relationship is to help your loved one feel free to disclose emotionally charged feelings and issues, without having to worry that we will tell friends, employers, and family. Trust is essential.

Under the healthcare codes of ethics, our primary counsellors see their client as his or her primary responsibility, including protecting his confidentiality. As a result, there is an obvious distinction between how they work with clients and how they work with family members.

CLIENT'S WRITTEN PERMISSION

When a client gives us written permission to speak with their family, this does not mean that we can reveal their protected personal information. It does mean that we can discuss, for example, whether the client is still at SCHC/GSWC, their general progress, and certain recommendations to support them in their life after treatment, such as attending our Virtual Family Services.

Sometimes a client will not give us permission to talk to their family or they remove existing consents at some point during their stay at SCHC or GSWC. While we do work with a client to understand why they refused or revoked consent, we are obligated to adhere to such requests.

Although it is difficult for families and SCHC staff, we are obligated to avoid contact. For example, if you were to call us, we would reply "*I'm sorry, but I can neither confirm nor deny that such person is here*" even if we had spoken with you the day or week before. In these situations where consent has not been given or has been removed, we encourage family members to reach out to their loved ones through their own means and ask them to provide SCHC with consent.

Other professionals who provide care to your loved one, such as a psychiatrist in their hometown, may benefit from knowing the clinical details of the client's experience at SCHC. In this case, we follow standard practice by obtaining a signed consent to provide information to the specific professional.

PHYSICIAN & PSYCHIATRIST

Our physician and psychiatrist do not routinely communicate directly with families.

SCHC & THE FAMILY

SCHC has a dedicated team for the families. Please contact ***family services*** *for any concerns, comments, and questions.*

email | familyservices@schc.ca

phone | 604-487-9050 ext. 205