

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, psychiatrist, nurses, and physician.

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 & Couples Facilitator will contact you** and update you on your loved one's primary counsellor. Although you may interact with your loved one's primary counsellor occasionally, you will primarily work with the Family & Couples Facilitator.
- **If you're interested in attending our Family & Couples Weekend**, one of our coordinators will contact you regarding registration and consents.
- **The Family & Couples Facilitator will address questions and concerns** you have throughout the treatment period. She will update your loved one's primary counsellor on all of your concerns. She will also go over the Family & Couples Weekend with you.
- **To speak with our Family & Couples Weekend Facilitator**, Carissa Muth, email carissam@schc.ca or phone 604-487-9050 ext. 206.

UNDERSTANDING WHY SCHC FOLLOWS THIS COMMUNICATION PROCESS

SCHC'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.



**Sunshine Coast
Health Centre**

Residential Addiction &
Mental Health Treatment Services

Communication Process CONTINUED ON BACK SIDE

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 his family, this does not mean that we can reveal his protected personal information. It does mean that we can discuss, for example, whether the client is still at SCHC, his general progress, and certain recommendations to support him in his life after treatment, such as attending our Family & Couples Weekend.

Sometimes a client will not give us permission to talk to his family or he removes existing consents at some point during his stay at SCHC. While we do work with a client to understand why he refused or revoked consent, we are obligated to adhere to his 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 his 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 COUNSELLORS & THE FAMILY

*SCHC has a dedicated counsellor for the families. Please contact **Carissa Muth** for any concerns, comments, and questions to her:*

email | carissam@schc.ca

phone | 604-487-9050 ext. 206