

## **OFFICE POLICIES AND PRACTICES**

*Please retain for your records*

This document contains the office policies and practices of Link Psychiatry. It includes the terms and conditions of the services we provide. It also includes declarations of the rights and responsibilities of our patients and the responsible parties who help pay for the services we provide to our patients.

Fees: Our doctors are not in-network for any insurance companies, and we require patients and/or identified responsible parties to pay up front for the services we provide. Payment is expected at the time of service unless other arrangements have been made. We accept cash, check, or credit card. Even if the patient's insurance company will reimburse the patient for part or all of the cost of care, the patient and all responsible parties are still responsible to pay up front for all services. If the patient or responsible party would like to request reimbursement from his or her insurance company, we can assist him or her in this process, as further described in the document, "Patient Billing Form." Each patient and responsible party will regularly receive a statement reflecting the services that the patient received and the payments that the patient and responsible parties have paid for those services, as well as outstanding balances, if any.

Non-Payment: Patients and responsible parties should notify us if problems arise that impact their ability to pay for services in a timely fashion. The information for at least one valid credit card will be kept on file for each patient unless the patient and/or responsible parties do not possess a credit card. If a patient has an outstanding balance that has not been paid, the patient and all responsible parties will receive an invoice for this outstanding balance. If the balance continues to be unpaid, the credit card on file will be charged the outstanding balance. If a patient has an outstanding balance that cannot be paid, we reserve the right to terminate services to the patient and to refer the patient to other providers.

Confidentiality and Privacy Practices: We are committed to protecting the privacy of our patients, legal guardians (if applicable), and the people who help pay for the services we provide ("responsible parties"). We abide by all applicable laws and regulations related to protecting patient privacy and the privacy of legal guardians and responsible parties. We take the privacy of our patients and the privacy of legal guardians and responsible parties seriously. Information provided as part our services to a patient is confidential except in the following circumstances:

- 1) For Treatment: In order to provide and help coordinate care that meets current standards of acceptable medical practice, we will, at times, need to communicate and share information, including a patient's mental health information or information about responsible parties, with the patient's other health care providers. These providers include, but are not limited to, the following:
  - a. the patient's psychotherapist(s) and/or counselor(s)
  - b. the patient's primary care provider(s)
  - c. other physicians, nurses, physician's assistants, nurse practitioners, and other health care providers who care for the patient

- d. the patient's pharmacy/pharmacies
  - e. the patient's medical and/or hospital laboratory/laboratories
  - f. the patient's social worker(s) and/or community care agencies
  - g. hospital staff, if the patient becomes hospitalized.
- 2) For Payment: Because we do not accept payments from insurance companies, we generally do not communicate with them directly. In some circumstances and at a patient's or legal guardian's request, we may communicate with his or her insurance company to support his or her efforts to obtain reimbursement from them for services we provide and for medications our doctors prescribe. For example, many insurance companies will not pay for certain mental health services without authorizing the services ahead of time. In order to acquire prior authorization, we would typically have to submit information about the patient's care needs and prior treatments to his or her insurance company.
  - 3) For friends, family members, and other social contacts who support a patient's health: It may be important for a patient's friends, family members, or other social contacts to be informed about his or her health problems, health care providers, and current treatment(s), treatment plan options, treatment plan risks, and treatment plan benefits. At a patient's request and with the patient's or legal guardian's permission, we will provide information about the patient's mental health and mental health care to these persons. Although responsible parties help pay for a patient's care, we cannot release information about the patient's mental health and mental health care to a responsible party without the patient's permission. At a minimum, however, we will ask the patient to allow us to communicate to the responsible party the following information about each service we provide to him or her: time, date, type of service, fee, and amount of fee for which the party is responsible.
  - 4) For parents or legal guardians of minors: Patients under 18 years of age are not legally entitled to the same confidentiality laws that apply to adult patients. Therapy is most effective, however, when a trusting relationship exists between patient and doctor. We prioritize the privacy of our minor patients to optimize our work. While a patient's parent(s) or legal guardian(s) will be informed about a minor patient's health problems, current treatment(s), treatment plan options, treatment plan risks, and treatment plan benefits, we typically do not reveal to parents or legal guardians the details of our doctors' psychotherapeutic interactions without the minor patient's permission unless necessary to do so to prevent harm (see 6 below).
  - 5) As required by law: Local, state, and federal laws and regulations require the disclosure of private information in certain specific circumstances. We must abide by these laws.
  - 6) To prevent harm: We are required by law and legal precedent to disclose private information if such disclosure will prevent or lessen a serious or imminent threat to the health or safety of a patient, another person, or the public. In such circumstances, we will generally be releasing private information to the police or another entity that is able to prevent or lessen the serious or imminent threat of harm. If we learn that a patient may seriously harm another person, we may be required by law and legal precedent to warn that person.
  - 7) To public health agencies: Governmental public health agencies require physicians to release private information about patients in specific circumstances, including to prevent or control

certain infectious diseases and food-borne illnesses, to mitigate child abuse or neglect, and to mitigate elder abuse or neglect. We must abide by these laws.

- 8) To health oversight agencies: As authorized or required by law, we may disclose private information to governmental and other agencies responsible for the oversight, regulation, licensing, accreditation, and auditing of health care services.
- 9) For lawsuits and other legal actions: We may be required to release private information in response to lawsuits, other legal proceedings, court or administrative orders, subpoenas, warrants, summons, or other lawful processes.
- 10) With patient permission: With a patient's or legal guardian's written permission, we may release the patient's mental health information to any other outside party. He or she may revoke this permission at a later time; however, we cannot retract any information that has already been released.

Medical Records vs. Psychotherapy Notes: For each patient, a medical record is created that documents the services provided to that patient, including the following: dates and times for each encounter; type of services delivered; reasons for each encounter; history, examination, and diagnostic test results; risk and protective factors; assessments; diagnoses; treatment plan; treatment response; and billing and coding information (CPT and ICD coding). For individual, couple, and family psychotherapy patients, a separate set of psychotherapy notes may be created, which are used to document and analyze the psychotherapy work. In the interest of maintaining the privacy and confidentiality of psychotherapy, the privacy of these notes is protected to a greater extent than medical records. Nonetheless, we may be required to release these notes in certain circumstances, including the following:

- 1) As required by law.
- 2) To prevent harm to the patient, another person, or the public.
- 3) To agencies responsible for the oversight, regulation, licensing, accreditation, and auditing of health care services.
- 4) In response to lawsuits, other legal proceedings, court or administrative orders, subpoenas, warrants, summons, or other lawful process.

Medical Information Rights: Although a patient's medical records are the property of Link Psychiatry, the patient, legal guardian, and/or responsible parties have the following rights related to the patient's medical records:

- 1) Right to inspect and copy: With certain exceptions, a patient or legal guardian has the right to inspect and/or receive a copy of the patient's medical records. If the patient or legal guardian requests a copy of the patient's medical records, the patient and all other responsible parties will be charged, at the patient's doctor's standard hourly rate, for the time it takes to prepare the copies.
- 2) Right to request an amendment or addendum: If a patient or legal guardian believes the patient's medical records are incorrect or incomplete, he or she may ask his Link Psychiatry, Inc. doctor to amend the information or create an addendum to the records. This request must be submitted to us in writing that is dated, timed, and signed. The patient's doctor may choose to deny the request, particularly if the record in question was not originally created

by Link Psychiatry, Inc. (e.g. copies of outside medical records or diagnostic tests that have been included in the record) or if the doctor believes the medical record to be accurate and complete.

- 3) Right to an accounting of disclosures: Each patient or legal guardian has the right, in certain circumstances, to have a list of the people to whom Link Psychiatry, Inc. has disclosed the patient's mental health information. This request must be submitted to us in writing that is dated, timed, and signed. If a patient makes more than one such request in a 12-month period, the patient and all other responsible parties will be charged, at the patient's doctor's standard hourly rate, for the time it takes to create the list.
- 4) Right to request restrictions: Although, as listed above, we may release a patient's mental health information to (1) other providers, (2) payors (e.g. the patient's insurance company), and (3) friends, family, and social supports, the patient or legal guardian may request that such information not be released to specific individuals in these categories. This request must be submitted to us in writing that is dated, timed, and signed. The request must include what information he or she does not want released and to whom he or she does not want the information released. We are not required to comply with such a request, particularly if the request interferes with the patient's care, the law, the patient's safety, and the safety of others.
- 5) Right to request confidential communications: Each patient, legal guardian, and/or responsible party has the right to request that we communicate with him or her in a way that maintains his or her privacy. For example, he or she may request that voice messages only be left at certain telephone numbers, but not at others. This request must be submitted in writing that is dated, timed, and signed. We will accommodate all reasonable requests.
- 6) Right to receive a copy of this information: Patients, legal guardians, and/or responsible parties have the right to receive a copy of this document. This request must be submitted in writing that is dated, timed, and signed.

Professional Consultation and Supervision: Our doctors regularly receive professional consultation and supervision from colleagues with expertise relevant to the care of our doctors' patients. This includes psychotherapy supervision groups, during which a small number of colleagues (usually 4-12 at one time) observe each other's psychotherapy sessions and provide consultation on the psychotherapy our doctors are providing. We give each patient or legal guardian the opportunity to indicate in writing whether or not the patient's doctor is allowed to disclose the patient's private information for the purpose of professional consultation and supervision. There is no penalty if a patient or legal guardian refuses to allow the patient's doctor to disclose private information for this purpose.

Audio and Video Recording: Our doctors often create an audio or video recording of psychotherapy sessions with patients. This recording serves two purposes:

- 1) Listening to and/or watching the recording of the session allows a patient's doctor to more precisely identify a patient's symptoms, reactions, and responses to psychotherapeutic interventions. This improves the quality of the doctor's services to the patient and can speed the patient's improvement and recovery.

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- 2) Listening to and/or watching the recording with supervisors, consultants, and/or colleagues allows a patient's doctor to receive more precise supervision and consultation on his or her services to a patient. Again, this improves the quality of the doctor's services to the patient and can speed the patient's improvement and recovery.

We believe audio and video recording to be important parts of ensuring psychotherapy patients receive the highest quality care possible. There is no additional charge for this service. We give each patient or legal guardian the opportunity to indicate in writing whether or not the patient's doctor is allowed to record the patient's psychotherapy sessions. We will not use the recordings for any other purpose (e.g. teaching trainees) unless we receive specific permission in writing from a patient to do so. Similarly, we will not keep any copies of the recordings any longer than necessary to accomplish these purposes unless we receive specific permission in writing from a patient to do so. There is no penalty if a patient or legal guardian refuses to allow the patient's doctor to record sessions.

Conduct Outside of the Office: To protect the privacy of our patients, legal guardians, and responsible parties, our doctors will not approach or greet their patients, the patients' legal guardians, or responsible parties if they happen to see them outside of the office. Please do not be offended if we apply this policy to you; this measure is simply to ensure that your privacy is not violated.

Care of Minors (under 18 years of age): To protect the safety of our patients and their families, no minor may be left unattended in the waiting area. For patients under 18 years of age, a parent, legal guardian, or adult chaperone chosen by the parent or legal guardian must accompany the patient to the waiting area and be available in the waiting area 10 minutes prior to the expected end of the appointment. Any absence of the parent, guardian, or identified adult chaperone from the waiting area during the appointment time must be approved by the patient's doctor.

Communications Outside of the Office: If a patient, legal guardian, or responsible party needs to reach a patient's doctor outside of scheduled appointment times, he or she should call the doctor's office phone and leave a voice message. The doctor will return the message within one business day. There is usually no charge for brief phone contact outside of scheduled appointment times; however, if an extended phone conversation is required, we will charge the patient and all responsible parties for this service at the patient's doctor's standard hourly rate. For urgent matters than cannot wait for a routine return phone call, a patient's doctor may provide paging or cell phone services. Paging and cell phone services should be reserved only for truly urgent matters, including the following: to avoid severe medication side-effects or withdrawal symptoms; or to prevent hospitalization. For emergent matters, particularly to prevent harm to the patient or others, 911 should be called or the patient should go to the nearest emergency department. In these circumstances, a patient or legal guardian may also try to contact the patient's doctor by pager or cell phone, but we ask that no one wait for a return call in such circumstances before accessing emergency services via 911 or an emergency department.

Electronic Communications: Email, texting, and other electronic messaging systems are not private forms of communication but are more like a postcard that can be viewed by anyone with access to certain areas of the internet and/or cellular system. Electronic communications should not be used for urgent or

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emergent matters, as our doctors may not check email or text messages frequently enough to respond in a timely manner. If a patient, the patient's legal guardian (if applicable), and the patient's doctor agree to use electronic communications for routine issues (e.g. appointment times, medication refills, etc.), a separate Electronic Communication Consent Form must be signed by the patient or the patient's legal guardian.

Vacations and Unavailability: We will notify patients (and legal guardians, if applicable) in advance of any periods of time that their doctor will be unavailable due to pre-scheduled vacations. We may not be able to notify patients (and legal guardians, if applicable) of other times of a doctor's unavailability that are the result of urgent or emergent matters. If a patient's doctor is unavailable for any significant period of time, the voicemail system message will contain instructions on whom to contact for assistance in his or her absence.

Cancellations: If a patient needs to cancel a previously scheduled appointment, we ask that he or she inform us of this as soon as possible. If we are informed of the cancellation more than 24 hours before the appointment, no one will be charged for the cancellation. If we are informed of the cancellation less than 24 hours before the appointment, the patient and all responsible parties will be charged 50% of the fee that would have been applied to the scheduled appointment.

Termination: A patient may discontinue care with Link Psychiatry at any time. There is no fee or charge for discontinuing care. We reserve the right to discontinue our services to a patient and to refer the patient to other providers, particularly in the following circumstances: (1) if the patient, legal guardian (if applicable), and/or responsible parties are unable to abide by the terms and conditions of these services as indicated in this document and in other documents signed by the patient, legal guardian, and/or responsible parties in pursuit of care with Link Psychiatry, Inc.; (2) if the patient and/or legal guardian (if applicable) is unable or unwilling to abide by the treatment plan developed between the patient and his or her doctor; or (3) if the patient and/or responsible parties are unable to pay for services or care provided to the patient, as noted above.

Changes to these Policies and Practices: We reserve the right to change the policies and practices listed in this document, and to make the changes applicable to any information we already have or will receive about a patient, legal guardian, and/or responsible parties. The patient, legal guardian (if applicable), and responsible parties will be informed in writing or electronically of any changes that we make.

Questions and Concerns: If you have any questions or concerns about this document, please contact us. If a patient, legal guardian, and/or responsible party believes his or her privacy or other rights have been violated, he or she may file a complaint with the Medical Board of California, Central Complaint Unit (Phone: 800-633-2322 or 916-263-2382; Fax: 916-263-2435; [www.mbc.ca.gov](http://www.mbc.ca.gov)) if in California or with the North Carolina Medical Board, Complaint Department (Phone: 800-253-9653 x501; [www.ncmedboard.org](http://www.ncmedboard.org)).