



Notice of Privacy Practices Effective April 14, 2003

This notice describes how medical information about you may be used and disclosed and how you can get access to this information. Please review it carefully.

If you have any questions about this Notice, please contact our

Privacy Contact (828) 255-7776

This Notice of Privacy Practices describes how we may use and disclose your protected health information to carry out treatment, payment, or health care operations and for other purposes that are permitted or required by law. It also describes your rights to access and control your protected health information. "Protected Health Information" is information about you, including demographic information, that may identify you and that relates to your past, present, or future physical or mental health condition and related health care services.

We are required to abide by the terms of this Notice of Privacy Practices. We may change the terms of our notice at any time. Upon your request, you will be provided with any revised Notice of Privacy Practices. The revised Notice may be found on our website at <http://www.csandnc.com> or may be obtained by calling the office and requesting that a revised copy be sent to you in the mail or asking for one at the time of your next appointment.

1. Uses and Disclosures of Protected Health Information

Your protected health information may be used and disclosed by your physician, our office staff, and others outside of our office who are involved in your care and treatment for the purpose of providing health care services to you. Your protected health information may also be used and disclosed to obtain payment for your health care bills and to support the operation of the physician's practice.

Following are examples of the types of uses and disclosures of your protected health care information that the physician's office is permitted to make. These examples are not meant to be exhaustive, but to describe the types of uses and disclosures that may be made by our office.

Treatment: We will use and disclose your protected health information to provide, coordinate, or manage your health care and any related services. This includes the coordination or management of your health care with a third party that has already obtained your permission to have access to your protected health information. For example, we would disclose your protected health information, as necessary, to a home health agency that provides care to you. We will also disclose protected health information to other physicians who may be treating you when we have the necessary permission from you to disclose your protected health information. For example, your protected health information may be provided to a physician to whom you have been referred to ensure that the physician has the necessary information to diagnose or treat you.

In addition, we may disclose your protected health information from time-to-time to another physician or health care provider (e.g., a specialist or laboratory) who, at the request of your physician, becomes involved in your care by providing assistance with your health care diagnosis or treatment to your physician.

Payment: Your protected health information will be used, as needed, to obtain payment for your health care services. This may include certain activities that your health insurance plan may undertake before it approves or pays for the health care services we recommend for you, such as making a determination of eligibility or coverage for insurance benefits, reviewing services provided to you for medical necessity, and undertaking utilization review activities. For example, obtaining approval for a hospital stay may require that your relevant protected health information be disclosed to the health plan to obtain approval for the hospital admission.

Healthcare Operations: We may use or disclose, as needed, your protected health information in order to support the business activities of your physician's practice. These activities include, but are not limited to, (1) assessment of quality of care and outcomes in your case and similar cases, (2) employee review activities, (3) learning how to improve our facilities and services, and (4) to determine how to continually improve the quality and effectiveness of the health care we provide.

For example, we may use a sign-in sheet at registration desks where you will be asked to sign your name and indicate your physician. We may also call you by name in the waiting room when your physician is ready to see you. We may use or disclose your protected

health information, as necessary, to contact you to remind you of your appointment. This may include reminders left on answering machines or messages left with other members of your household or emergency contacts.

We will share your protected health information with third party “business associates” that perform various activities (e.g., billing procedures, transcription services) for the practice. Whenever an arrangement between our office and a business associate involves the use or disclosure of your protected health information, we will have a written contract with that associate that contains terms to protect the privacy of your protected health information.

We may use or disclose your protected health information, as necessary, to provide you with information about treatment alternatives or other health-related benefits and services that may be of interest to you. We may also use and disclose your protected health information for other marketing activities. For example, your name and address may be used to send you a newsletter about our practice and the services we offer. We may also send you information about products or services that we believe may be beneficial to you. You may contact our Privacy Contact to request that these materials not be sent to you.

Uses and Disclosures of Protected Health Information Based Upon Your Written Authorization

Other uses and disclosures of your protected health information will be made only with your written authorization, unless otherwise permitted or required by law as described below. You may revoke this authorization at any time in writing, except to the extent that your physician or the physician’s practice has taken an action in reliance on the use or disclosure indicated in the authorization.

Other Permitted and Required Uses and Disclosures That May Be Made With Your Consent, Authorization, or Opportunity to Object

We may use and disclose your protected health information in the following instances. You have the opportunity to agree or object to the use or disclosure of all or part of your protected health information. If you are not present or able to agree or object to the use or disclosure of the protected health information, then your physician may, using professional judgment, determine whether the disclosure is in your best interest. In this case, only the protected health information that is relevant to your health care will be disclosed.

Others Involved In Your Health Care: Unless you object, we may disclose to a member of your family, a relative, a close friend, or any other person you identify, your protected health information that directly relates to that person’s involvement in your health care. If you are unable to agree or object to such a disclosure, we may disclose such information, as necessary, if we determine that it is in your best interest based on our professional judgment. We may use or disclose protected health information to notify or assist in notifying a family member, personal representative, or any other person that is responsible for your care or your location, general condition, or death. Finally, we may use or disclose your protected health information to an authorized public or private entity to assist in disaster relief efforts and to coordinate uses and disclosures to family or other individuals involved in your health care.

Emergencies: We may use or disclose your protected health information in an emergency treatment situation. If this happens, your physician shall try to obtain consent as soon as reasonably practicable after the delivery of treatment. If your physician or another physician in the practice is required by law to treat you and the physician has attempted to obtain your consent, but is unable to obtain your consent, he or she may still use or disclose your protected health information to treat you.

Communication Barriers: We may use and disclose your protected health information if your physician or another physician in the practice attempts to obtain consent from you, but is unable to do so due to substantial communication barriers, and the physician determines, using professional judgment, that you intend to consent to use or disclosure under the circumstances.

Other Permitted and Required Uses and Disclosures That May Be Made Without Your Consent, Authorization, or Opportunity Object

We may use or disclose your protected health information in the following situations without your consent or authorization. These situations include:

Required By Law: We may use or disclose your protected health information to the extent that the use or disclosure is required by law. The use or disclosure will be made in compliance with the law and will be limited to the relevant requirements of the law. You will be notified, as required by law, of any such uses or disclosures.

Public Health: We may disclose your protected health information for public health activities and purposes to a public health authority that is permitted by law to collect or receive the information. The disclosure will be made for the purpose of controlling disease, injury, or disability. We may also disclose your protected health information, if directed by the public health authority, to a foreign government agency that is collaborating with the public health authority.

Communicable Diseases: We may disclose your protected health information, if authorized by law, to persons who may have been exposed to a communicable disease or may otherwise be at risk of contracting or spreading the disease or condition.

Health Oversight: We may disclose your protected health information to a health oversight agency for activities authorized by law, such as audits, investigations, and inspections. Oversight agencies seeking this information include government agencies that oversee the health care system, government benefit programs, other government regulatory programs, and civil rights laws.

Abuse or Neglect: We may disclose your protected health information to a public health authority that is authorized by law to receive reports of child abuse or neglect. In addition, we may disclose your protected health information, if we believe that you have been a victim of abuse, neglect, or domestic violence, to the government entity or agency authorized to receive such information. In this case, the disclosure will be made consistent with the requirements of applicable federal and state laws.

Food and Drug Administration: We may disclose your protected health information to a person or company required by the Food and Drug Administration to report adverse events, product defects or problems, biologic product deviations, track products, to enable product recalls, to make repairs or replacements, or to conduct post-marketing surveillance, as required.

Legal Proceedings: We may disclose protected health information in the course of any judicial or administrative proceeding, in response to an order of a court or administrative tribunal (to the extent such disclosure is expressly authorized), in certain conditions in response to a subpoena, discover request, or other lawful process.

Law Enforcement: We may also disclose protected health information, so long as applicable legal requirements are met, for law enforcement purposes. These law enforcement purposes include: (1) legal processes otherwise required by law, (2) limited information requests for identification and location purposes, (3) pertaining to victims of a crime, (4) suspicion that death has occurred as a result of criminal conduct, (5) in the event that a crime occurs on the premises of the practice, and (6) medical emergency (not on the practice's premises) due to the occurrence of a crime.

Coroners, Funeral Directors, and Organ Donation: We may disclose protected health information to a coroner or medical examiner for identification purposes, determining cause of death, or for the coroner or medical examiner to perform other duties authorized by law. We may also disclose protected health information to a funeral director, as authorized by law, in order to permit the funeral director to carry out his or her duties. We may disclose such information in reasonable anticipation of death. Protected health information may be used and disclosed for cadaveric organ, eye, or tissue donation purposes.

Research: We may disclose your protected health information for research purposes when an institutional review board or privacy board, that has reviewed the research proposal and established protocols to ensure the privacy of your health information, has approved the research.

Criminal Activity: Consistent with applicable federal and state laws, we may disclose your protected health information if we believe that the use or disclosure is necessary to prevent or lessen a serious and imminent threat to the health or safety of a person or the public. We may also disclose your protected health information if it is necessary for law enforcement authorities to identify or apprehend an individual.

Military Activity and National Security: When the appropriate conditions apply, we may use or disclose protected health information of individuals who are Armed Forces personnel (1) for activities deemed necessary by appropriate military command authorities; (2) for the purpose of determination by the Department of Veterans Affairs of your eligibility for benefits; or (3) to foreign military authority if you are a member of that foreign military service. We may also disclose your protected health information to authorized federal officials for conducting national security and intelligence activities, including for the provision of protective services to the President or others legally authorized.

Government Functions: Specialized government functions, such as protection of public officials or reporting to various branches of the armed services, may require use or disclosure of your health information.

Workers' Compensation: Your protected health information may be disclosed by us as authorized to comply with Workers' Compensation laws and other similar legally established programs.

Inmates: We may use or disclose your protected health information if you are an inmate of a correctional facility and your physician created or received your protected health information in the course of providing care to you.

Required Uses and Disclosures: Under the law, we must make disclosures to you and when required by the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services to investigate or determine our compliance with requirements.

2. Your Rights

Following is a statement of your rights with respect to your protected health information and a brief description of how you may exercise these rights.

You have the right to inspect your protected health information. This means you may inspect and obtain a copy of protected health information about you that is contained in a designated record set for as long as we maintain the protected health information. A “designated record set” contains medical and billing records and any other records that your physician and the practice use for making decisions about you.

Under federal law, however, you may not inspect or copy the following records: (1) psychotherapy notes, (2) information compiled in reasonable anticipation of, or use in, a civil or administrative action or proceeding, and (3) protected health information that is subject to law that prohibits access to protected health information. Depending on the circumstances, you may have the right to have this decision reviewed. Please contact our Privacy Contact if you have questions about access to your medical record.

You have the right to request a restriction of your protected health information. This means you may ask us not to use or disclose any part of your protected health information for the purposes of treatment, payment, or health care operations. You may also request that any part of your protected health information not be disclosed to family members or friends who may be involved in your care or for notification purposes as described in this Notice of Privacy Practices. Your request must state the specific restriction requested and to whom you want the restriction to apply.

Your physician is not required to agree to a restriction that you may request. If your physician believes it is in your best interest to permit use and disclosure of your protected health information, your protected health information will not be restricted. If your physician does agree to the requested restriction, we may not use or disclose your protected health information in violation of that restriction, unless it is needed to provide emergency treatment. With this in mind, please discuss with your physician any restriction you wish to request. You may request a restriction to the Privacy Officer at Carolina Spine & Neurosurgery Center.

You have the right to request to receive confidential communications from us by alternative means or at an alternative location. We will accommodate reasonable requests. We may also condition this accommodation by asking you for information as to how payment will be handled or specification of an alternative address or other method of contact. We will not request an explanation from you as to the basis for the request. Please make this request in writing to our Privacy Contact.

You may have the right to have your physician amend your protected health information. This means you may request an amendment of protected health information about you in a designated medical record set for as long as we maintain this information. In certain cases, we may deny your request for an amendment. If we deny your request for an amendment, you have the right to file a statement of disagreement with us and we may prepare a rebuttal to your statement and will provide you with a copy of any such rebuttal. Please contact our Privacy Contact to determine if you have questions about amending your medical record.

You have the right to receive an accounting of certain disclosures we have made, if any, of your protected health information. This right applies to disclosures for purposes other than treatment, payment, or health care operations as described in this Notice of Privacy Practices. It excludes disclosures we may have made to you, for a facility directory, to family members or friends involved in your care, or for notification purposes. You have the right to receive specific information regarding these disclosures that occurred after April 14, 2003. You may request a shorter timeframe. The right to receive this information is subject to certain exceptions, restrictions, and limitations.

You have the right to obtain a paper copy of this notice from us, upon request, even if you have agreed to accept this notice electronically.

3. Complaints

You may complain to us or to the Secretary of Health and Human Services if you believe your privacy rights have been violated by us. You may file a complaint with us by notifying our Privacy Contact of your complaint. We will not retaliate against you for filing a complaint.

4. Obligations of Carolina Spine & Neurosurgery Center

Carolina Spine & Neurosurgery Center is required to:

- Maintain the privacy of protected health information;
- Provide you with this notice of our legal duties and privacy practices with respect to your health information;
- Abide by the terms of this notice;

- Notify you if we are unable to agree to a requested restriction on how your information is used or disclosed;
- Accommodate reasonable requests you may make to communicate health information by alternative measures or at alternative locations; and
- Obtain your written authorization to use or disclose your health information for reasons other than those listed above and permitted under law.

Carolina Spine & Neurosurgery Center reserves the right to change its information practices and to make the new provisions effective for all protected health information it maintains. Revised notices will be made available to you by: (1) the posting of revised editions of this notice on our website, (2) sending electronic forms of the revised notice, (3) mailing a revised copy upon your request, and/or (4) presenting a revised edition upon your next appointment at our office.

Contact Information:

You may contact our Privacy Officer at (828) 255-7776 for further information about the complaint process.

This notice was published and becomes effective on April 14, 2003.