

San Mateo County Behavioral Health and Recovery Services

PROTOCOL FOR EMAIL USAGE

The purpose of this protocol is to describe appropriate uses of email within Behavioral Health and Recovery Services. It is assumed that email sent by BHRS staff will comply with all confidentiality regulations including mandatory encryption as needed, as described in BHRS Policy 03-11 Email Use, Amended 9-08.

Examples of **appropriate** uses of email within BHRS include:

- Communicating dates, times, arrangements for a variety of meetings and conferences.
- Requesting participation in committee, planning group, etc.
- Sending documents such as meeting minutes, policies, agendas etc.
- Providing brief information of clinical value to co-providers about clients within the system (or to community based agencies if encrypted) or as needed for referrals.
- Communicating change in client status (such as hospitalization) to involved clinicians in a timely manner.
- Communicating appointment times for clients to others involved.
- Indicating problems within the physical plant of clinics and county sites (ex., Fax is down).

Examples of **inappropriate** uses of email include:

- Documenting problems and/or issues between staff through very long emails (i.e. multi-page or with multiple threads) unless directed to do so by a supervisor.
- Using email to try to resolve interpersonal difficulties or discuss emotionally charged issues.
- Including numerous individuals on messages with complaints about personnel or practices who do not have a “need to know” and/or are not involved in the issue/concern.
- Including numerous individuals on messages with Protected Health Information who do not have a “need to know”.
- Using email to communicate information and reach decisions about complex clinical issues.
- Using email to vent about personnel or practices. Email should not be used in lieu of direct communication with involved or responsible parties. Other alternatives include:
 - ✓ Going “up the line” first by bringing the difficult situation to your own supervisor’s attention and seeking help in resolution.
 - ✓ Communicating directly with involved personnel, supervisors and /or managers by telephone or in person.
 - ✓ Requesting a face-to-face meeting or arranging a telephone conference call when several individuals are involved.
 - ✓ Being certain that the supervisor or manager directly involved knows about the situation.
- Using email for personal gain, i.e., outside business activities, items for sale, etc.