

## Text Messaging SMDHU Clients

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### Introduction

SMDHU provides services or care to clients who have expressed a need to communicate with health unit staff via text messaging. Some SMDHU clients do not have access to alternative communication methods (cell phone minutes or land line) and/or SMDHU stakeholders or partners utilize text communication for immediate or timely communication. Although text communication cannot be guaranteed to be secure, it is important that SMDHU meet client needs via methods convenient to the client while still ensuring standards of privacy and confidentiality are met.

### Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to inform Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit, employees, students and medical residents of the parameters for either sending a text message to, or receiving a text message from a SMDHU client and exchanging communications between SMDHU employees, students and medical residents.

### Legislative Authority

N/A

### Policy Definitions and Interpretation

This policy applies to the use of mobile communication devices that are supplied by the agency to support communication and service delivery.

**Mobile Communication Device** is a comprehensive term and includes but is not limited to the following: cell phones, blackberries, two way radios, pagers, or laptops or tablets with an air card or rocket stick that supports connectivity.

Client (as per policy IM0901) is an individual, family, community group, agency, business or premise, coalition or community network, professional group, population or any other entity who receive care and/or service by a health unit employee, student or intern.

### For use in this Policy:

**Appointment** is defined as: SMDHU clinic appointment, home visit or meeting.

**Operations information** means information that enables SMDHU operations or service delivery that is generic and does not include personal or personal health information.

Operations information may include text messages such as:

- I am running late – will arrive at school for meeting in 20 minutes.
- I must send last-minute regrets for workshop. I will follow-up with you at another time.
- Please bring the banner to the event - I forgot it at SMDHU office.
- Please tell team I will be 10 minutes late for meeting.

## ***Policy***

Text message communication [sending or receiving to/from SMDHU client(s)] can only be completed by individuals with a SMDHU issued encrypted mobile device.

Text message communication will only occur to book new appointments with clients or change/cancel previously scheduled appointments/meetings or to communicate operations information to SMDHU community clients.

Client consent to utilize text message communication must always be obtained prior to SMDHU commencing text message as a method of communication. Consent can be verbal and documentation within the client record must exist indicating that consent to utilize text message communication was obtained.

Clients will be informed of the strict parameters of SMDHU text messaging which include:

- Booking a new appointment
- Cancelling/changing a previously booked appointment
- Communicating operations information to community client/partner.

Clients will be informed that SMDHU will not initiate or respond to text messages outside of SMDHU business hours or if relevant, the employee's specific days of work.

Clients will be informed that they must not communicate any personal health information in text messages.

Communication of personal health information may occur in very rare circumstances and must be approved by service area director or MOH office.

SMDHU staff, students or medical residents may communicate operations information to other SMDHU staff if the receiving colleague also has a SMDHU encrypted mobile device. No personal or personal health information will be texted to or from SMDHU staff, students or medical residents.

Text communication will be documented in compliance with policy IM0109. Once recorded as per agency policy the text message (both sent and received) will be deleted from the mobile device.

## ***Related Policies***

TQ0108 - Cell Phones and Other Mobile Communications Devices – Deployment and Use  
IM0109 – Documentation of Client Care and or Services

## **Review/Revision History:**

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