

PATIENT NOTICE OF PRIVACY PRACTICES

As Required by the Privacy Regulations Created as a Result of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996-(HIPAA), Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health Act (HITECH Act), and associated regulations and amendments

THIS NOTICE DESCRIBES HOW MEDICAL INFORMATION ABOUT YOU MAY BE USED OR DISCLOSED AND HOW YOU CAN GET ACCESS TO THIS INFORMATION. PLEASE REVIEW IT CAREFULLY.

If you have any questions about this notice or if you need more information, please contact:

*Houston Spine and Rehabilitation Centers
3101 College Park Dr., The Woodlands, TX 7738
Telephone: 281-362-0006*

ABOUT THIS NOTICE

We understand that health information about you is personal and we are committed to protecting your information. We create a record of the care and services you receive at all divisions of The Houston Spine & Rehabilitation Centers. We need this record to provide care (treatment), for payment of care provided, for health care operations, and to comply with certain legal requirements. This Notice will tell you about the ways in which we may use and disclose health information about you. It also describes your rights and certain obligations we have regarding the use and disclosure of health information. We are required by law to follow the terms of this Notice that is currently in effect.

WHAT IS PROTECTED HEALTH INFORMATION (“PHI”)

PHI is information that individually identifies you. We create a record or get from you or from another health care provider, health plan, your employer, or a health care clearinghouse that relates to:

- Your past, present, or future health conditions,
- The provision of health care to you, or
- The past, present, or future payment for your health care.

HOW WE MAY USE AND DISCLOSE YOUR PHI

We may use and disclose your PHI in the following circumstances:

• **Treatment.** We may use or disclose your PHI to give you medical treatment or services and to manage and coordinate your medical care. For example, your PHI may be provided to a physician or other health care provider (e.g., a specialist or laboratory) to whom you have been referred to ensure that the physician or other health care provider has the necessary information to diagnose or treat you or provide you with a service.

• **Payment.** We may use and disclose your PHI so that we can bill for the treatment and services you receive from us and can collect payment from you, a health plan, or a third party. This use and disclosure 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, we may need to give your health plan information about your treatment in order for your health plan to agree to pay for that treatment.

- **Health Care Operations.** We may use and disclose PHI for our health care operations. For example, we may use your PHI to internally review the quality of the treatment and services you receive and to evaluate the performance of our team members in caring for you. We also may disclose information to physicians, nurses, medical technicians, medical students, and other authorized personnel for educational and learning purposes.

- **Appointment Reminders/Treatment Alternatives/Health-Related Benefits and Services.** We may use and disclose PHI to contact you to remind you that you have an appointment for medical care, or to contact you to tell you about possible treatment options or alternatives or health related benefits and services that may be of interest to you.

- **Minors.** We may disclose the PHI of minor children to their parents or guardians unless such disclosure is otherwise prohibited by law.

- **Research.** We may use and disclose your PHI for research purposes, but we will only do that if the research has been specially approved by an authorized institutional review board or a privacy board that has reviewed the research proposal and has set up protocols to ensure the privacy of your PHI. Even without that special approval, we may permit researchers to look at PHI to help them prepare for research, for example, to allow them to identify patients who may be included in their research project, as long as they do not remove, or take a copy of, any PHI. We may disclose PHI to be used in collaborative research initiatives amongst The Houston Spine & Rehabilitation Centers providers. We may use and disclose a limited data set that does not contain specific readily identifiable information about you for research. However, we will only disclose the limited data set if we enter into a data use agreement with the recipient who must agree to (1) use the data set only for the purposes for which it was provided, (2) ensure the confidentiality and security of the data, and (3) not identify the information or use it to contact any individual.

- **As Required by Law.** We will disclose PHI about you when required to do so by international, federal, state, or local law.

- **To Avert a Serious Threat to Health or Safety.** We may use and disclose PHI when necessary to prevent a serious threat to your health or safety or to the health or safety of others. But we will only disclose the information to someone who may be able to help prevent the threat.

- **Business Associates.** We may disclose PHI to our business associates who perform functions on our behalf or provide us with services if the PHI is necessary for those functions or services. For example, we may use another company to do our billing, or to provide transcription or consulting services for us. All of our business associates are obligated, under contract with us, to protect the privacy and ensure the security of your PHI.

- **Military and Veterans.** If you are a member of the armed forces, we may disclose PHI as required by military command authorities. We also may disclose PHI to the appropriate foreign military authority if you are a member of a foreign military.

- **Workers' Compensation.** We may use or disclose PHI for workers' compensation or similar programs that provide benefits for work-related injuries or illness.

- **Abuse, Neglect, or Domestic Violence.** We may disclose PHI to the appropriate government authority if we believe a patient has been the victim of abuse, neglect, or domestic violence and the patient agrees or we are required or authorized by law to make that disclosure.

- **Data Breach Notification Purposes.** We may use or disclose your PHI to provide legally required notices of unauthorized access to or disclosure of your health information.

- **Lawsuits and Disputes.** If you are involved in a lawsuit or a dispute, we may disclose PHI in response to a court or administrative order. We also may disclose PHI in response to a subpoena, discovery request, or other legal process from someone else involved in the dispute, but only if efforts have been made to tell you about the request or to get an order protecting the information requested. We may also use or disclose your PHI to defend ourselves in the event of a lawsuit.

- **Law Enforcement.** We may disclose PHI, so long as applicable legal requirements are met, for law enforcement purposes.

- **Uses and Disclosures That Require Us to Give You an Opportunity to Object and Opt Out**

- **Individuals Involved in Your Care.** If authorization is previously obtained in writing, we may disclose to a member of your family, a relative, a close friend or any other person you identify, your PHI that directly relates to that person's involvement in your health care.

Your Rights Regarding Your PHI

You have the following rights, subject to certain limitations, regarding your PHI:

- **Inspect and Copy.** You have the right to inspect, receive, and copy PHI that may be used to make decisions about your care or payment for your care. We have up to **30 days** to make your PHI available to you and we may charge you a reasonable fee for the costs of copying, mailing or other supplies associated with your request. ***You can only direct us in writing to submit your PHI to a third party not covered in this notice.*** We may not charge you a fee if you need the information for a claim for benefits under the Social Security Act or any other state or federal needs-based benefit program. We may deny your request in certain limited circumstances. If we do deny your request, you have the right to have the denial reviewed by a licensed healthcare professional who was not directly involved in the denial of your request, and we will comply with the outcome of the review.

- **Summary or Explanation.** We can also provide you with a summary of your PHI, rather than the entire record, or we can provide you with an explanation of the PHI which has been provided to you, so long as you agree to this alternative form and pay the associated fees.

- **Electronic Copy of Electronic Medical Records.** If your PHI is maintained in an electronic format (known as an electronic medical record or an electronic health record), you have the right to request that an electronic copy of your records be transmitted to you or another individual or entity. If the PHI is not readily producible in

the form or format you request your record will be provided in a readable hard copy form.

- **Receive Notice of a Breach.** You have the right to be notified upon a breach of any of your unsecured PHI.

- **Request Amendments.** If you feel that the PHI we have is incorrect or incomplete, you may ask us to amend the information. You have the right to request an amendment for as long as the information is kept by or for us. A request for amendment must be made in writing to the Privacy Officer at the address provided at the beginning of this Notice and it must tell us the reason for your request. 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.

- **Accounting of Disclosures.** You have the right to ask for an “accounting of disclosures,” which is a list of the disclosures we made of your PHI. To request this list or accounting of disclosures, you must submit your request in writing to the Privacy Officer. You may be charged for the reasonable costs of providing the list. We will tell you what the costs are, and you may choose to withdraw or modify your request before the costs are incurred.

- **Request Restrictions.** You have the right to request a restriction or limitation on the PHI we use or disclose about you for treatment, payment, or health care operations. We are not required by federal regulation to agree to your request. If we do agree with your request, we will comply unless the information is needed to provide emergency treatment. To request restrictions, you must make your request in writing to the Privacy Officer. Your request must state the specific restriction requested, whether you want to limit our use and/or disclosure; and to whom you want the restriction to apply.

- **Request Confidential Communications.** You have the right to request that we communicate with you only in certain ways to preserve your privacy. For example, you may request that we contact you by mail at a specific address or call you only at your work number. You must make any such request in writing and you must specify how or where we are to contact you.

- **Paper Copy of This Notice.** You have the right to a paper copy of this Notice, even if you have agreed to receive this Notice electronically. You may obtain a copy of this Notice by visiting our website: www.spineandrehab.com or contact The Houston Spine & Rehabilitation Centers office you are receiving services from.

- **Changes to This Notice** We reserve the right to change this Notice. We reserve the right to make the changed Notice effective for PHI we already have as well as for any PHI we create or receive in the future. A copy of our current Notice is available in our office and on our website.

- **Complaints** If you believe your privacy rights have been violated; you may file a complaint with The Houston Spine & Rehabilitation Center Privacy Officer, at the address listed at the beginning of this Notice.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF RECEIPT OF PATIENT NOTICE OF PRIVACY PRACTICES I acknowledge that I read and/or received a copy of The Houston Spine & Rehabilitation Center Patient Notice of Privacy Practices effective September 23, 2013.

Date: _____

Patient Signature: _____