The Ottawa Hospital Research Institute | L'Hôpital d'Ottawa Institut de recherche

Memo to: **Clinical Research Scientists, Investigators, Staff and Trainees; OHRI Administration**

From: **Clinical Research Administration**

Subject: **Research Participant Consent to Communicate by E-mail**

Date: **October 16, 2020**

Due to the current pandemic restrictions, there are many Research Studies that are operating remotely with reduced or modified "in-person" participant visits. Although Research teams may have access to participants' e-mail information through Epic, first contact with research participants, who have Permission To Contact (PTC) on file, must be in person or by phone or mail, NOT by email. Even if the Permission to Contact (PTC) for research purposes is on file in Epic, this does not cover contacting the participant by email. In consultation with TOH and UOHI Privacy Office, consent to communicate via email is required. Email communication with research participants is not permitted until participants have had the risks associated with email use explained to them, and the Research Team has obtained their consent to correspond by email. Consent to communicate via email for research purposes must be obtained and documented.

Specifically, participants must be told that communicating by email may not be secure and could be intercepted/viewed by a third party. In addition, participants should be reminded that confidential personal or health information should only be communicated during in-person meetings or by phone, and not by email. Email correspondence with participants should be primarily used to confirm visits, send reminders or send out general information regarding the Research Study. Confidential information should be discussed by phone or during in-person visits. After receiving the patient's consent to communicate by email you may provide consent documents, information sheets, etc. via email, as long as you follow the instructions related to adding password protection/encryption to documents.

Please see the attachment "Research Participant Consent to Communicate by Email" which expands on the information that must be discussed with participants during the consent process. The consent form may be signed in-person or verbal consent obtained and documented on the form by research staff. Evidence of participant consent must be retained with your research records. An Epic *smartphrase* has been created and is available to facilitate documentation within EPIC. For studies documented outside of Epic, you may document that the patient has provided consent to communicate by email in your research source documentation.

We realize this is new information with impact to your workflow. The OHSN-REB is creating a guidance document on the use of email for research purposes; the document will include guidelines and instructions to be followed to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of potential participants / participants have been met. In addition, consent to communicate via email process with participants will be discussed in the following educations sessions:

- Initial Contact and Types of Consent - Monday October 19th 10:30 to 11:30
- Virtual/Remote Consent Discussion and Virtual/Remote Signature - Thursday October 22nd, noon to 2:00 pm

You can view these and other events in the Clinical Research Week calendar by following this link. The calendar includes links to add the sessions to your own calendar.

Please reach out to rebadministration@toh.ca or CRFacilitators@ohri.ca with any further questions.