



Notice of Privacy Practices

This notice describes how personal health information about a client may be used, disclosed, and how a client can gain access to that information. The effective date of this notice is August 1, 2013.

West Houston Counseling Center, PLLC (WHCC) is committed to respecting the privacy of our clients and protecting information about clients that we receive. We are legally required to protect the privacy of our clients health information. Protected Health Information (PHI) includes information that can be used to identify a client that we have created or received about a client's past, present, or future health conditions, services provided, and payment of services. With some exceptions, we will not use or disclose more PHI than necessary to accomplish the purpose of the use or disclosure. We are required to ensure that information that identifies our clients is kept private, give our clients this notice of our legal duties and privacy practices, and uphold the terms of this notice that are currently in effect. Records are stored in a way to protect client confidentiality and privacy rights. We are required to retain our records of the services provided to clients.

Collected information:

In order for WHCC to provide services we obtain personal information from our clients. This PHI may include an individual's past, present, or future physical or mental health condition; the provision of health care to the individual; and the past, present, or future payment health care services. This identifying information may also include a client's name, address, date of birth, social security number, family information, clinical information, and financial information. We may also receive information from physicians, schools, and other health care providers.

Use and Disclosure of Information:

- We may only use or disclose PHI as defined by the Privacy Rule or if you allow authorization in writing.
- We are required to disclose PHI to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in a compliance investigation, review, or enforcement action.
- We may use information about our clients to provide services and provide recommendations, referrals, or other appropriate alternatives.
- We may disclose PHI for the treatment activities of any health care provider including consultation between providers regarding a client.
- We may disclose PHI to an insurance company, employee assistance program, managed care group, or other third party provider for the purpose of obtaining benefit information, authorization, claims, and payment. This disclosure of PHI may contain, but not be limited to name, date of birth, diagnosis, session dates, symptoms, treatment, and progress.
- We may contact family members or friends who help pay for a client's services to obtain financial information.
- We may use and disclose PHI as needed to support business activities included, but not limited to, appointment scheduling, confirmation, and payment.
- We may also use client information to teach or train supervised counseling students and interns.
- We may use and disclose PHI for case management and care coordination.
- We may use Psychotherapy notes for treatment, training, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services investigations, and to defend ourselves in a legal proceeding brought on by the client.

Client Rights:

- A client has the right to disclose or release PHI that is not already included in the Privacy Rule with written consent. A client may revoke this disclosure or release of information at any time in writing. We are unable to reverse any disclosures previously made with your consent.
- A client has the right to inspect a copy of their PHI. WHCC may charge a reasonable fee for copies, mailing, or other supplies associated with the request. WHCC reserves the right to restrict access of PHI if there is evidence that access would cause harm to the client or in exceptional circumstances. This request must be made in writing. If the request is denied you have the right for the denial be reviewed. A professional chosen by WHCC will review the request and denial. The professional reviewing the denial will not be the professional who originally denied the request.
- A client has the right to amend your PHI if you feel it is incomplete or incorrect. A client may submit in writing their request to correct or add information and must include reasoning to support the request. A client has the right to request an amendment for as long as the information is held by WHCC. WHCC may deny the request for amendment if the request is not in writing, does not include a reason, information was not created by WHCC, is not a part of client information kept by WHCC, is not part of the information a client may be permitted to inspect, or the information is accurate and complete.
- A client has the right to request accounting of disclosures made of PHI. This list will not include disclosures that are required by law and may be made without authorization (i.e. reporting of child abuse). A reasonable fee may be applied for copying, mailing, or other supplies associated with the request.
- A client has the right to request a limitation or restriction of PHI for treatment, payment, or business operations. A request must be made in writing and include what information is to be limited or restricted and to whom the limitations or restrictions apply. WHCC is not required to agree to the request.
- A client has the right to request confidential communications (i.e. calls at a specific phone number). A client may request to communicate about clinical matters in a certain way or at a certain location. To make a request submit in writing how and where you wish to be contacted. WHCC will accommodate all reasonable requests so as long as we can provide it in the format requested.
- Private paying clients have the right to request PHI not be communicated to their health plan.

Legal & Ethical Standards:

- The following are uses and disclosures permitted by the federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPPA), ethical standards, and legal standards without an authorization - reporting abuse, neglect, emergencies, national security, law enforcement needs, public safety issues, judicial and administrative proceedings, mandatory government agency audits or investigations, court order (subpoena), admission of harmful acts, or necessary to prevent or lessen a serious threat (this information will be disclosed to a person or persons reasonably able to prevent or lessen the threat; including the target of the threat), or comply with workers compensation laws.

If a client believes their privacy rights have not been upheld they may contact either WHCC Privacy Official below. A client has the right to file a complaint with the Department of Health and Human Services at 200 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20201. A client will not be penalized for filing a complaint. Confidentiality is waived if a client files a malpractice suit or formal complaint against the counselor or WHCC.

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WHCC reserves the right to alter the terms of our Notice of Privacy Practices at any time. Any new Notice of Privacy Practices will be effective for all PHI that we maintain at that time. Upon revision of the Notice of Privacy Practices WHCC will provide one to clients on their next visit, post the revised Notice to our website (www.WestHoustonCounseling.com), or mail a revised copy of the Notice upon request.