

NOTICE OF PRIVACY PRACTICES for the offices of Dr. Joseph Audia & Associate

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

Effective date of notice: February 10, 2003

GENERAL RULE - We respect our legal obligation to keep health information that identifies you private. We are obligated by law to give you notice of our privacy practices. Generally, we cannot use your health information in our office or disclose it outside of our office without your written permission. Sometimes the written permission will be called a consent form, and sometimes it will be called an authorization form. The type of permission form will depend upon the kinds of uses or disclosures that are involved. In some limited situations, the law allows or requires us to disclose your health information without either a written consent or authorization.

TREATMENT, PAYMENT, AND HEALTH CARE OPERATIONS - The most common reason why we use or disclose your health information is for treatment, payment or health care operations. Examples of how we use or disclose information for treatment purposes are: setting up an appointment for you; testing or examining your eyes; prescribing glasses, contact lenses, or eye medications and faxing them to be filled; showing you low vision aids; referring you to another doctor or clinic for eye care or low vision aids or services; or getting copies of your health information from another professional that you may have seen before us. Examples of how we use or disclose your health information for payment purposes are: asking you about your health or vision care plans, or other sources of payment; preparing and sending bills or claims; and collecting unpaid amounts (either ourselves or through a collection agency or attorney). "Health care operations" mean those administrative and managerial functions that we have to do in order to run our office. Examples of how we use or disclose your health information for health care operations are: financial or billing audits; internal quality assurance; personnel decisions; participation in managed care plans; defense of legal matters; business planning; and outside storage of our records.

USES OR DISCLOSURES WITH CONSENT - We will ask you to sign a consent form allowing us to use and disclose your health information for purposes of treatment, payment, and health care operations of this office. We are allowed to refuse to treat you if you do not sign the consent form.

We use information for treatment purposes, when, for example, we set up an appointment for you, when our technician or doctor tests your eyes, when the doctor prescribes glasses or contact lenses, when the doctor prescribes medication, when our staff helps you select and order glasses or contact lenses, and when we show you low vision aids. We may disclose your health information outside of our office for treatment purposes if, for example, we refer you to another doctor or clinic for eye care or low vision aids or services, if we send a prescription for glasses or contacts to our laboratory to be filled, when we provide a prescription for medication to a pharmacist, or when we phone to let you know that your glasses or contact lenses are ready to be picked up. Sometimes we may ask for copies of your health information from another professional that you may have seen before us.

We use your health information for payment purposes when, for example, our staff asks you about health or vision care plans that you may belong to, or about other sources of payment for our services, when we prepare bills to send to you or your health or vision care plan, when we process payment by credit card, and when we try to collect unpaid amounts due. We may disclose your health information outside of our office for payment purposes when, for example, bills or claims for payment are mailed, faxed, or sent by computer to you or your health or vision plan, or when we occasionally have to ask a collection agency or attorney to help us with unpaid amounts due.

We use and disclose your health information for health care operations in a number of ways. A health care operation means those administrative and managerial functions that we have to do in order to run our office. We may use or disclose your health information, for example, for financial or billing audits, for internal quality assurance, for personnel decisions, to enable our doctors to participate in managed care plans, for the defense of legal matters, to develop business plans, and for outside storage of our records.

USES AND DISCLOSURES WITHOUT CONSENT OR AUTHORIZATION - In some limited situations, the law allows or requires us to use or disclose your health information without your permission. Not all of these situations will apply to us; some may never come up at our office at all. Such uses or disclosures are:

- for public health purposes, such as contagious disease reporting, investigation or surveillance; and notices to and from the federal Food and Drug administration regarding drugs or medical devices;
- disclosures to governmental authorities about victims of suspected abuse, neglect or domestic violence;
- uses and disclosures for health oversight activities, such as for the licensing of doctors; for audits by Medicare or Medicaid; or for investigation of possible violations of health care laws;
- disclosures for judicial and administrative proceedings, such as in response to subpoenas or orders of courts or administrative agencies;
- disclosures for law enforcement purposes, such as to provide information about someone who is or is suspected to be a victim of a crime; to provide information about a crime at our office; or to report a crime that happened somewhere else;
- disclosure to a medical examiner to identify a dead person or to determine the cause of death; or to funeral directors to aid in burial; or to organizations that handle organ or tissue donations;
- uses or disclosures for health related research;
- uses and disclosures to prevent a serious threat to health or safety;
- uses or disclosures for specialized government functions, such as for the protection of the president or high ranking government officials; for lawful national intelligence activities; for military purposes; or for the evaluation and health of members of the foreign service;
- disclosures of de-identified information;
- disclosures of a "limited data set" for research, public health, or health care operations;

- incidental disclosures that are an unavoidable by-product of permitted uses or disclosures;
 - disclosures relating to worker's compensation programs;
 - disclosures to business associates who perform health care operations for us and who commit to respect the privacy of your health information;
- Unless you object, we will also share relevant information about your care with your family or friends who are helping you with your eye care.

APPOINTMENT REMINDERS — We may call, write or e-mail to remind you of scheduled appointments or to notify you of other treatments or services available at our office that might help you. In the event we are calling, we might leave you a message on your home answering machine or with someone who answers your phone if you are not at home.

SECURITY - A log is kept in our office of those who process door keys to our offices. In the event that our personnel changes within either of our office, our security code is changed immediately. All computers convert to a pass code protected screen saver within 30 seconds of inactivity. Any and all paper documents that contain patient information are shredded before being placed into the trash.

OTHER DISCLOSURES - We will not make any other uses or disclosures of your health information unless you sign a written authorization form. The content of an "authorization form" is determined by federal law. You do not have to sign such a form. If you do sign one, you may revoke it at any time unless we have already acted in reliance upon it. Revocations must be in writing. Send them to the office contact person named at the beginning of this Notice. Sometimes, we may initiate the authorization process if the use or disclosure is our idea. Sometimes, you may initiate the process if it's your idea for us to send your information to someone else. In either situation you will give us a properly completed authorization form, or you can use one of ours. If we initiate the process and ask you to sign an authorization form, you do not have to sign it. If you do not sign the authorization, we cannot make the use or disclosure.

YOUR RIGHTS REGARDING YOUR HEALTH INFORMATION - The law gives you many rights regarding your health information. You can:

- Ask us to restrict our uses and disclosures for purposes of treatment (except emergency treatment), payment or health care operations. We do not have to agree to do this, but if we agree, we must honor the restrictions that you want. To ask for a restriction, send a written request to office contact person at the address, fax or E-mail shown at the beginning of this Notice.
- Ask us to communicate with you in a confidential way, such as by phoning you at work rather than at home, by mailing health information to a different address, or by using E-mail to your personal E Mail address. We will accommodate these requests if they are reasonable, and if you pay us for any extra cost. If you want to ask for confidential communications, send a written request to office contact person at the address, fax or E-mail shown at the beginning of this Notice.
- Ask to see or to get photocopies of your health information. By law, there are a few limited situations in which we can refuse to permit access or copying. For the most part, however, you will be able to review or have a copy of your health information within thirty days of asking us or sixty days if the information is stored off-site. You may have to pay for photocopies, at our usual and customary records search fee and photocopy fee per page. You will be charged our usual and customary photocopy fee per page and a record search fee in advance. If we deny your request, we will send you a written explanation, and instructions about how to get an impartial review of our denial if one is legally available. By law, we can have one 30-day extension of the time for us to give you access or photocopies if we send you a written notice of the extension. If you want to review or get photocopies of your health information, send a written request to office contact person at the address, fax or E-mail shown at the beginning of this Notice.
- Ask us to amend your health information if you think that it is incorrect or incomplete. If we agree, we will amend the information within 60 days from when you ask us. We will send the corrected information to persons who we know got the wrong information, and others that you specify. If we do not agree, you can write a statement of your position, and we will include it with your health information along with any rebuttal statement that we may write. Once your statement of position and/or our rebuttal is included in your health information, we will send it along whenever we make a permitted disclosure of your health information. By law, we can have one 30-day extension of time to consider a request for amendment if we notify you in writing of the extension. If you want to ask us to amend your health information, send a written request, including your reasons for the amendment, to the office contact person at the address, fax or E-mail shown at the beginning of this Notice.
- Get a list of the disclosures that we have made of your health information within the past six years (or a shorter period if you want). By law, this list will not include: disclosures for purposes of treatment, payment or health care operations; disclosure with your authorization; incidental disclosure; disclosures required by law; and some other limited disclosures. You are entitled to one such list per year without charge. If you want more frequent lists, you will be charged our usual and customary photocopy fee per page and a record search fee in advance. We will usually respond to your request within 60 days of receiving it, but by law we can have one 30-day extension of time if we notify you of the extension in writing. If you want a list, send a written request to office contact person at the address, fax or E-mail shown at the beginning of this Notice.
- Get additional paper copies of this Notice of Privacy Practices upon request. It does not matter if you got one electronically or in paper form already. You will have to pay for them in advance a fee at the usual and customary fee for this office. If you want additional paper copies, send a written notice to office contact person at the address, fax or E-mail shown at the beginning of this Notice.

OUR NOTICE OF PRIVACY PRACTICES - By law, we must abide by the terms of this Notice of Privacy Practices until we choose to change it. We reserve the right to change this notice at any time in compliance with and as allowed by law. If we change this Notice, the new privacy practices will apply to your health information that we already have as well as to such information that we may generate in the future. If we change our Notice of Privacy Practices, we will post the new notice in our office, have copies available in our office, and post it on our Web site.

COMPLAINTS - If you think that we have not properly respected the privacy of your health information, you are free to complain to us or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; Office for Civil Rights. We will not retaliate against you if you make a complaint. If you want to complain to us, send a written complaint to OFFICE COORDINATOR at the address, fax or E-mail shown at the beginning of this Notice. If you prefer, you can discuss your complaint in person or by phone.

FOR MORE INFORMATION - IF YOU WANT MORE INFORMATION ABOUT OUR PRIVACY PRACTICES, CALL OR VISIT THE OFFICE CONTACT PERSON AT THE ADDRESS OR PHONE NUMBER SHOWN AT THE BEGINNING OF THIS NOTICE.