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Why we need to have you read and sign this form

The form you are supposed to read is our office's "Privacy Policy." It tells you what we will and won't do with the information in your dental records. There is quite a bit of confidential information there--your medical history, date of birth, social security number (usually), address, phone number, and your credit history with our office. Obviously you don't want this information to get out to everyone, and neither do we. However, under certain circumstances outlined in the Policy, we will pass some of this information to selected people. For example, if we need to refer you to specialists, we will tell them your medical and dental history so they can treat you safely and efficiently. If you have dental insurance, we will be including your social security number with the claims in order to get payment, and we will tell them what procedures we have done. If you don't pay your bill and we have to turn your account over for collections, we will give the agency enough information so they can locate you. This kind of information use is known as "Treatment, Payment and Operations" use, or TPO, and those getting the information are required by law to keep it confidential.

We will try to keep information transferred to the minimum necessary--for example, usually the insurance company has no reason to know your medical history, so we won't tell them that. Specialists usually don't need your financial information, unless insurance is involved. Since this is a small office, all the employees have to know about most of your dental and medical status--in a larger office, the assistants might not get involved in the financial aspect, or the financial coordinator wouldn't know your medical history. Everyone here does everything, so the front desk has to be aware, for example, that you must take antibiotics before every appointment if you have a hip replacement. The office staff have been trained in privacy protection, and they will not discuss you or your condition with anyone outside the office except as necessary for TPO. They may occasionally ask you if they can tell a prospective patient that we did a root canal on you and it was totally painless; or that we made your dentures, can we have a new patient talk to you and see what it was like from the patient's perspective? We won't do this without your explicit permission, however, since that falls outside TPO use.

In summary, nothing really has changed, but new government regulations require that we get you to sign this, to be sure you know how your health care information is used. The official Privacy Policy was written by attorneys, and is not easy reading, but the above summarizes what it is trying to do.

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