



Notice of Privacy Practices

Effective date: October 1, 2006

THIS NOTICE DESCRIBES HOW PROTECTED HEALTH INFORMATION ABOUT YOU MAY BE USED AND DISCLOSED AND HOW YOU CAN GET ACCESS TO THIS INFORMATION.

PLEASE REVIEW IT CAREFULLY.

This Notice tells you about the ways in which GEMCare Health Plan (referred to as “we” or “the Plan”) may collect, use and disclose your protected health information and your rights concerning your protected health information. “Protected health information”, (PHI) is information about you, including demographic information including Social Security Number, that can reasonably be used to identify you and that relates to your past, present or future physical or mental health or condition, the provision of health care to you or the payment for that care. For example, your medical record is PHI because it includes your name and other identifiers.

We are required by federal and state laws to provide you with this Notice about your rights and our legal duties and privacy practices with respect to your protected health information. We must follow the terms of this Notice while it is in effect.

More Stringent State and Federal Laws

California State Law is more stringent than HIPAA in several areas: when the individual is entitled to greater access to records than under HIPAA, and when records are more protected from disclosure under state law than under HIPAA. Certain federal laws are also more stringent than HIPAA. GEMCare Health Plan will continue to abide by these more stringent state and federal laws. The federal laws include applicable Internet privacy laws and the federal laws and regulations governing the confidentiality of health information and substance abuse treatment. For example, California State law mandates reporting certain types of wounds or physical injuries to a law enforcement official.

How we may use and disclose your protected health information

We may use and disclose your protected health information for different purposes. The examples below are provided to illustrate the types of uses and disclosures we may make without your authorization for payment, health care operations and treatment.

- **Payment.** We use and disclose your protected health information in order to pay for your covered health expenses. For example, we may use your protected health information to process claims or be reimbursed by another insurer that may be responsible for payment.
- **Health Care Operations.** We use and disclose your protected health information in order to perform our plan activities, such as quality assessment activities or administrative activities, including data management or customer service.
- **Treatment.** We may use and disclose your protected health information to assist your health care providers (doctors, pharmacies, hospitals and others) in your diagnosis and treatment. For example, we may disclose your protected health information to providers to provide information about alternative treatments.
- **Plan Sponsor.** If you are enrolled through a group health plan, we may provide nonidentifiable summaries of claims and expenses for enrollees in your group health plan to the plan sponsor, which is usually the employer. If the plan sponsor provides plan administration services, we may also provide access to identifiable health information to support its performance of such services which may include but are not limited to claims audits or customer services functions. GEMCare Health Plan will only share health information upon a certification from the plan sponsor representing there are restrictions in place to ensure that only plan sponsor employees with a legitimate need to know will have access to health information in order to provide plan administration functions.
- **Business Associates.** We may contract with business associates to perform certain functions or activities on our behalf, such as payment and health care operations. Whenever an arrangement between GEMCare Health Plan and another company involves the use or disclosure of your PHI, that business associate will be required to keep your information confidential.

Other permitted or required disclosures

- **As Required by Law.** We must disclose protected health information about you when required to do so by law.
- **Public Health Activities.** We may disclose protected health information to public health agencies for reasons such as preventing or controlling disease, injury or disability.
- **Victims of Abuse, Neglect or Domestic Violence.** We may disclose protected health information to government agencies about abuse, neglect or domestic violence.
- **Health Oversight Activities.** We may disclose protected health information to government oversight agencies (e.g., California Department of Health Services) for activities authorized by law.
- **Judicial and Administrative Proceedings.** We may disclose protected health information in response to a court or administrative order. We may also disclose protected health information about you in certain cases in response to a subpoena, discovery request or other lawful process.
- **Law Enforcement.** We may disclose protected health information under limited circumstances to a law enforcement official in response to a warrant or similar process; to identify or locate a suspect; or to provide information about the victim of a crime.
- **Coroners, Funeral Directors, Organ Donation.** We may release protected health information to coroners or funeral directors as necessary to allow them to carry out their duties. We may also disclose protected health information in connection with organ or tissue donation.
- **Research.** Under certain circumstances, we may disclose protected health information about you for research purposes, provided certain measures have been taken to protect your privacy.
- **To Avert a Serious Threat to Health or Safety.** We may disclose protected health information about you, with some limitations, when necessary to prevent a serious threat to your health and safety or the health and safety of the public or another person.
- **Special Government Functions.** We may disclose information as required by military authorities or to authorized federal officials for national security and intelligence activities.

- **Workers' Compensation.** We may disclose protected health information to the extent necessary to comply with state law for workers' compensation programs.

Other uses or disclosures with an authorization

Other uses or disclosures of your protected health information will be made only with your written authorization, unless otherwise permitted or required by law. You may revoke an authorization at any time in writing, except to the extent that we have already taken action on the information disclosed or if we are permitted by law to use the information to contest a claim or coverage under the Plan.

Your rights regarding your protected health information

You have certain rights regarding protected health information that the Plan maintains about you.

- **Right To Access Your Protected Health Information.** You have the right to review or obtain copies of your protected health information records, with some limited exceptions. Usually the records include enrollment, billing, claims payment and case or medical management records. Your request to review and/or obtain a copy of your protected health information records must be made in writing. We may charge a fee for the costs of producing, copying and mailing your requested information, but we will tell you the cost in advance.
- **Right To Amend Your Protected Health Information.** If you feel that protected health information maintained by the Plan is incorrect or incomplete, you may request that we amend the information. Your request must be made in writing and must include the reason you are seeking a change. We may deny your request if, for example, you ask us to amend information that was not created by the Plan, as is often the case for health information in our records, or you ask to amend a record that is already accurate and complete.

If we deny your request to amend, we will notify you in writing. You then have the right to submit to us a written statement of disagreement with our decision and we have the right to rebut that statement.

- **Right to an Accounting of Disclosures by the Plan.** You have the right to request an accounting of disclosures we have made of your protected health information. The list will not include our disclosures related to your treatment, our payment or health care operations, or disclosures made to you or with your authorization. The list may also exclude certain other disclosures, such as for national security purposes. Your request for an

accounting of disclosures must be made in writing and must state a time period for which you want an accounting. This time period may not be longer than six years and may not include dates before April 14, 2003. Your request should indicate in what form you want the list (for example, on paper or electronically). The first accounting that you request within a 12-month period will be free. For additional lists within the same time period, we may charge for providing the accounting, but we will tell you the cost in advance.

- **Right To Request Restrictions on the Use and Disclosure of Your Protected Health Information.** You have the right to request that we restrict or limit how we use or disclose your protected health information for treatment, payment or health care operations. *We may not agree to your request.* If we do agree, we will comply with your request unless the information is needed for an emergency. Your request for a restriction must be made in writing. In your request, you must tell us (1) what information you want to limit; (2) whether you want to limit how we use or disclose your information, or both; and (3) to whom you want the restrictions to apply.
- **Right To Receive Confidential Communications.** You have the right to request that we use a certain method to communicate with you about the Plan or that we send Plan information to a certain location if the communication could endanger you. Your request to receive confidential communications must be made in writing. Your request must clearly state that all or part of the communication from us could endanger you. We will accommodate all reasonable requests. Your request must specify how or where you wish to be contacted.
- **Right to Receive a Paper Copy of this Notice.** You have a right at any time to request a paper copy of this Notice, even if you had previously agreed to receive an electronic copy.
- **Contact Information for Exercising Your Rights.** You may exercise any of the rights described above by contacting our privacy office. See the end of this Notice for the contact information.

Health information security

GEMCare Health Plan requires its employees to follow the GEMCare Health Plan security policies and procedures that limit access to health information about members to those employees who need it to perform their job responsibilities. In addition, GEMCare Health Plan maintains physical, administrative and technical security measures to safeguard your protected health information.

Changes to this notice

We reserve the right to change the terms of this Notice at any time, effective for protected health information that we already have about you as well as any information that we receive in the future. We will provide you with a copy of the new Notice whenever we make a material change to the privacy practices described in this Notice. We also post a copy of our current Notice on our website at www.gemcarehealthplan.com. Any time we make a material change to this Notice, we will promptly revise and issue the new Notice with the new effective date.

Complaints

If you believe that your privacy rights have been violated, you may file a complaint with us and/or with the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services. All complaints to the Plan must be made in writing and sent to the privacy office listed at the end of this Notice.

We support your right to protect the privacy of your protected health information.
We will not retaliate against you or penalize you for filing a complaint.

Contact the plan

If you have any complaints or questions about this Notice or you want to submit a written request to the Plan as required in any of the previous sections of this Notice, please contact:

Address: GEMCare Health Plan
Attention: Privacy Officer
5080 California Avenue, Suite 425
Bakersfield, CA 93309

You may also contact us at:

Telephone: 1-877-697-2464
Fax: 1-661-716-4800
Email: Privacy@gemcarehealthplan.com