

Notice of Privacy Practices

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.

My Commitment to Your Privacy

Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC. is dedicated to maintaining the privacy of your personal health information as part of providing professional care. I am aware that privacy is a very important concern for all those who come to this office. It is also complicated because I must take into consideration the many federal and state laws and my professional ethics, the National Association of Social Workers' Code of Ethics. Because the rules are so complicated, some parts of this Notice are very detailed, and you may want to read them more than once to be certain you understand them. Please talk with me about any specific questions or concerns.

A. Introduction – To my Clients

This notice will tell you how I handle your medical information. It tells how I use this information here in this office, how I share it with other professionals and organizations, and how you can see it. I want you to know all of this so that you can make the best decisions for yourself and your family. Because the laws of this state and the laws of the federal government are very complicated and I do not want you to have to read information that may not apply to you, I have removed some small sections. If you have any questions or want to know more about anything in this notice, please ask me for more explanations or more details.

B. What is Meant by "Your Medical Information"

Each time you visit Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC or any other doctor's office, hospital, clinic, or any other healthcare providers, information is collected about you and your physical and mental health. It may be information about your past, present, or future health, or conditions, or the tests and treatment you have received from us or from others, or about payment for healthcare. The information collected from you is called, in the law, PHI, which stands for Protected Health Information. This information goes into your medical or healthcare record at this office.

In this office, PHI is likely to include these kinds of information.

(This list is intended to give you a good idea of what is in your PHI. There may be other kinds of information that go into your healthcare records here.)

- Your history – As a child, in school, and at work, marriage and personal history.
- Reasons you came in for treatment – Your problems, complaints, symptoms, or needs.
- Diagnoses – Diagnoses are the medical terms for your problems or symptoms.
- Treatment Plan – A list of the treatments and any other services which I think will be best to help you.
- Progress Notes – Each time you come in I write notes about how you are doing, what I notice about you, and what you tell me.
- Records I have received with your consent from you or others who treated you or evaluated you. This most often includes:

Psychological test scores, school records, and other reports.

Information about medication you took or are taking.

Copies of correspondence received or sent out on your behalf or received from you

Billing and insurance information

When you understand what is in your record and what it is used for you can make better decisions about who, when, and why others should have this information.

Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC uses this information for many purposes. For example, it may be used to.

- *Plan your care and treatment*
- *Decide how well treatments are working for you.*
- *Talk with other healthcare professionals who are also treating you, such as your family doctor or the professional who referred you to this office.*
- *Show that you actually received services from Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC which are billed to you or to your health insurance company.*
- *Measure the results of the work done in this office in order to improve the way Beth D. Bowers, MSW, LCSW does her job.*
- *Receive or provide professional supervision, training, and consultation.*

Although your health record is the physical property of the healthcare practitioner or facility that collected it, the information belongs to you. You can read it, and if you want a copy one can be made for you. (Though you may be charged for the costs of copying or mailing if you want it mailed to you.) In some very rare situations you cannot see all of what is in your records (for example, psychotherapy notes made by your therapist). If you find anything in your records that you think is incorrect or believe that something important is missing, you can ask that your record be amended, or that information be added to your record. However, in some very rare situations Beth D. Bowers, MSW, LCSW doesn't have to agree to amend your records. Please ask about any further clarification you require or any specific questions or concerns you have.

C. Privacy and the Laws

Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC is required to tell you about privacy because of the privacy regulations of a federal law, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPPA). The HIPPA law requires that Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC keep your Personal Healthcare Information (of PHI) private and give you this notice of my legal duties and privacy practices which is called the Notice of Privacy Practices (or NPP). Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC will obey the rules of this notice as long as it is in effect, but if the notice is changed the rules of the new NPP will apply to all the PHI we keep. If this NPP is changed, copies of the new Notice will be available to you in the office and will be accessible on the "Client Forms" web page of Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC, www.bethdbowerscounseling.com.

D. How your Protected Health Information Can be Used and Shared

When your information is read by this office and used to make decisions about your care that is called, in the law, "use". If the information is shared with or sent to others outside this office, that is called, in the law "disclosure". Except in some special circumstances, when your PHI is used in this office or disclosed to others, only the minimum necessary PHI needed is shared for those other people to do their jobs. The law gives you rights to know about your PHI, how it is used, and to have a say in how it is disclosed (shared) and so you will be told more about what is done with your information.

Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC uses and discloses PHI for several reasons. Mainly, it will be used and disclosed for routine purposes and those are explained more on the following pages of this NPP. For other uses, you must be told about them and there must be a written authorization from you unless the law lets or requires Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC to make the disclosure without your authorization. However, the law also says that there are some uses and disclosures that don't need your consent or authorization.

1. Uses and Disclosures of PHI in Healthcare With your Consent

After you have read this Notice you will be asked to sign a separate consent form to allow Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC to use and share your PHI. In almost all cases the intent is to use your PHI here in this office or to share your PHI with other people or organizations to provide treatment for you, arrange for payment for the services you receive, or for some other business functions called healthcare operations. Together these routine purposes are called TPO (Treatment, Payment, or Operations) and the consent form you sign allows Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC to use and disclose your PHI for TPO. Because this is very important, please make sure that you understand the previous sentence.

1a. For Treatment, Payment, or Healthcare Operations

Information about you and your condition is needed to provide care to you. You have to agree to let Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC collect this information and to use it and share it to care for you properly. Therefore you must sign the consent form before any treatment can begin because if you do not agree and consent you cannot be treated. When you come to this office, information may be collected about you and all of it may go into your healthcare records here. Generally, Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC may use or disclose your PHI for three purposes: treatment, obtaining payment, and what are called healthcare operations.

For treatment.

These are some examples so that you can understand how Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC uses and discloses your PHI for treatment.

Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC may use your medical information to provide you with psychological treatments or services. These might include individual or family therapy, treatment planning, or measuring the benefits of services provided.

Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC may share or disclose your PHI to others who provide treatment to you. If you are being treated by a team (such as your personal physician, psychiatrist, school counselor, etc) some of your PHI may be shared with them (if you give your consent) so that the services you receive will work together. The other professionals treating you will also enter their findings, the actions they took, and their plans into your medical record and so we all can decide what treatments work best for you and make up a treatments plan. You may be referred to other professionals or consultants for services Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC cannot provide, and in these instances they will to be given some information about you and your conditions. Their opinions and findings may be incorporated into your records here. If you receive treatment in the future from other professionals, your PHI from Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC may be shared with them should you so request and upon receipt of your written consent.

For payment.

Your information may be used to bill you, your insurance, or others so Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC can be paid for the treatments provided to you. Your insurance company may be contacted by Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC to check on exactly what your insurance covers. Your insurance company may have to be told about your diagnoses, what treatments you have received, and the changes expected in your conditions. Your insurance company will need to be told when you were seen, your progress, and other similar findings.

For healthcare operations.

There are a few other ways Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC may use your PHI for what are called healthcare operations. For example, your PHI may be used to see where improvements can be made in the care and services provided to you. Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC may be required to supply some information to some government health agencies so they can study disorders and treatment and make plans for services that are needed. Should either of those situations arise, your name and personal information will be removed from what is sent.

1b. Other Uses in Healthcare

Appointment Reminders.

Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC may use and disclose medical information to reschedule or remind you of appointments for treatment or other care. If you want to be called or contacted by postal mail only at your home, only at your work, or prefer some other way to reach you, that can be arranged upon your request.

Treatment Alternatives.

Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC may use and disclose your PHI to tell you about or recommend possible treatments or alternatives that may be of help to you.

Business Associates.

There are some jobs that Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC may hire other businesses to do. In the law, they are called Business Associates. Examples include copy services, billing, and accounting services. Sometimes these Business Associates need to receive some of your PHI to do their jobs properly. To protect your privacy they have agreed in their contract with Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC to safeguard your information.

2. Uses and Disclosures that Require your Authorization

If Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC wants to use your information for any purpose besides the TPO or those described above, we need your permission on an authorization form.

If you do authorize Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC to use or disclose your PHI, you can revoke (cancel) that permission in writing, at any time. After that time your information will not be used or disclosed for the purposes that had been agreed to on the authorization form. Of course any information that has already been disclosed with your permission or that has been used by this office cannot be taken back.

3. Uses and Disclosures of PHI from Mental Health Records that do NOT Require a Consent or Authorization

The law allows Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC to use and disclose some of your PHI without your consent or authorization in some cases. Following are some examples of when your information may have to be shared.

When required by law.

There are some federal, state, or local laws which require the disclosure of PHI. Beth D. Bowers, MSW, LCSW has to report suspected abuse or neglect of a disabled adult or elderly person. If you are involved in a lawsuit or legal proceeding and a subpoena, discovery request, or other lawful process is received by Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC, we may have to release some of your PHI. This release will only occur after trying to tell you about the request, consulting your lawyer, or trying to get a court order to protect the requested information. You may also wish to request a copy of the "Legal Involvement & Confidentiality" form for review. This form is also `

For health oversight.

Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC may have to disclose some information to the government agencies that are responsible for enforcing privacy laws. The North Carolina Social Work Certification and Licensure Board, the professional licensing board of Beth D. Bowers, MSW, LCSW, has the power, when necessary, to request health records in order to investigate a complaint against her.

For law enforcement purposes.

Medical information may be released by Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC if asked to do so by a law enforcement official to investigate a crime or criminal.

For public health activities.

When necessary, Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC may release some of your PHI to agencies which investigate diseases or injuries.

Relating to decedents.

Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC might disclose PHI to coroners, medical examiners or funeral directors, and to organizations relating to organ, eye, or tissue donation or transplants.

For specific government functions.

Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC may disclose PHI of military personnel and veterans to government benefit programs relating to eligibility and enrollment. Your PHI may be disclosed to Workers Compensation and Disability programs, to correctional facilities if you are an inmate, and for national security reasons.

To prevent a serious threat to health or safety.

If Beth D. Bowers, MSW, LCSW comes to believe that there is a serious threat to your health or safety or that of another person or the public, some of your PHI may be disclosed. This disclosure will only be made to persons who can prevent the danger.

4. Uses and Disclosures Where You Have an Opportunity to Object

Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC can share some information about you with your family or close others. Information will only be shared with those involved in your care and anyone else you choose, such as close friends or clergy. You will be asked about who you want to have told what information about your condition or treatment. Once you have shared your wishes, they will be honored as long as it is not against the law.

If it is an emergency, a situation so that you cannot be asked if you disagree, information can be shared if Beth D. Bowers, MSW, LCSW believes that it is what you would have wanted and if it is believed it will help you if it is shared. If information is shared in an emergency, you will be informed as soon as possible. If you don't approve, the sharing of that information will be stopped, as long as it is not against the law.

5. An Accounting of Disclosures

When your PHI is disclosed, Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC may keep some records of whom it was sent to, when it was sent, and what was sent. You can get an accounting of many of these disclosures.

E. Your Rights Regarding Your Health Information

1. You can ask for communication about your health and related issues to take place in a particular way or at a certain place which is more private for you. For example, you can ask to be called at home, and not at work to schedule or to cancel an appointment. Every effort will be made to do as you ask.

2. You have the right to ask me (Beth Bowers) to limit what I tell people involved in your care or involved in the payment of your care, such as family members and your friends. While this request does not have to be agreed to, if the request is agreed to, this agreement will be kept except if it is against the law, or in an emergency, or when the information is necessary to treat you.

3. You have the right to look at the health information Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC has about you, such as your medical and billing records, with the exception of psychotherapy notes. You can get a copy of these records, but you may be charged a fee for the copy. Please speak with Beth D. Bowers, MSW, LCSW to arrange how to see your records.

4. If you believe the information in your records is incorrect or missing important information, you can ask that changes be made to amend your health information. You must make this request in writing to Beth D. Bowers, MSW, LCSW, including the reasons you want to make the changes.

5. You have the right to a copy of this notice. If Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC makes any changes to this Notice of Privacy Practices, you will be notified and supplied with an updated copy. You may always request a copy of the current Notice of Privacy Practices at any time by contacting Beth D. Bowers, MSW, LCSW, or by accessing it on the "Client Forms" web page of Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC, www.bethdbowerscounseling.com.

6. You have a right to file a complaint if you believe your privacy rights have been violated. You can file a complaint with me (Beth Bowers) and with the Secretary of the US Department of Health and Human Services. All complaints should be made in writing. Filing a complaint will not change the healthcare provided for you in any way.

Also, you may have other rights which are granted to you by the laws of our state and these may be the same or different from the rights described above. These situations may be discussed with you now, or as they arise.

F. If You Have Questions or Problems

If you need more information or have questions about the privacy practices described above, if you have a problem with how your PHI has been handled, please contact Beth D. Bowers, MSW, LCSW by phone at 368-5900. You have a right to file a complaint with Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC and with the Secretary of the US Department of Health and Human Services. Your care received from Beth D. Bowers Counseling, PLLC will not be limited in any way and no actions will be taken against you should you make a complaint.

The effective date of this notice is February 14, 2011.