

**Thomas Hospital****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.**

Thomas Hospital is required to protect the privacy of your confidential personal health information, referred to below as protected health information ("PHI"). This Notice of Privacy Practices ("Notice") is provided to you as a requirement of the privacy regulations issued under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 ("HIPAA"). This Notice describes how Thomas Hospital may use and disclose your PHI to carry out treatment, payment and health care operations and for other purposes that are permitted or required by law. This Notice also describes your rights to access and control your PHI. Thomas Hospital will make a good faith effort to obtain from you a written acknowledgement or receipt of this Notice.

In this Notice, Thomas Hospital provides categories that describe these uses and disclosures and, in some cases, examples are provided to help you better understand each category.

In addition to the privacy protection provided under federal law, Alabama law (referred to in this notice as the Alabama Requirements) requires us in certain situations (i) to get your written consent (or, according to some of the Alabama requirements, written consent from your attorney, guardian, or upon court order) before we can use or disclose your information, or (ii) to keep records of certain events for a period of time that is longer than what is required under HIPAA. The Alabama Requirements may apply:

- If you qualify as a patient that suffers from a sexually transmitted disease;
- If you qualify as a patient that receives benefits from the State of Alabama for certain developmental disabilities or mental retardation;
- If you qualify as a patient that the Alabama Medicaid Program has asked us to serve as a Case Management Service Provider for;
- If you qualify as a patient that receives rehabilitative services through the Alabama Medicaid Program;
- If you qualify as a patient that receives certain benefits under the Alabama Preventive Health Education Program;
- If you qualify as a patient that receives certain Children's Specialty Clinic Services under the Alabama Medicaid Program;
- To certain disclosures of counselors, psychologists and psychiatrists of Thomas Hospital;
- To certain monitoring records kept by Thomas Hospital regarding specified diagnostic, radiology and nuclear doses;
- To certain disclosures of the Thomas Hospital Nursing Facility;
- To certain activities of the Thomas Hospital Hospice;
- To certain disclosures and records of the Thomas Hospital Birthing Center;
- To certain activities of the Thomas Hospital Mental Illness Community Program and Adult Mental Illness Foster Care Facility; or
- To certain disclosures of the Thomas Hospital Pharmacy.

**Uses and Disclosures for Treatment, Payment and Health Care Operations.** Thomas Hospital may use or disclose your PHI for the purposes of treatment, payment and health care operations, described in more detail below, without obtaining written authorization from you.

**For Treatment.** Thomas Hospital may use and disclose PHI in the course of providing, coordinating, or managing your medical treatment, including the disclosure of PHI for treatment activities of another health care provider. These types of uses and disclosures may generally take place between physicians, nurses, technicians, and other health care professionals who provide you health care services or are otherwise involved in your care. For example, if you are

being treated by a primary care physician, that physician may need to disclose PHI to a specialist physician whom he or she consults regarding your condition, or to a nurse who is assisting in your care.

For Payment. Thomas Hospital may use and disclose PHI in order to bill and collect payment for the health care services provided to you. For example, Thomas Hospital may need to give PHI to your health plan in order to be reimbursed for the services provided to you. Thomas Hospital may also disclose PHI to its business associates, such as billing companies, claims processing companies and others that assist in processing health claims. Thomas Hospital may also disclose PHI to other health care providers and health plans for the payment activities of such providers or health plans.

For Health Care Operations. Thomas Hospital may use and disclose PHI for health care operations, including for quality assessment and improvement. For example, Thomas Hospital may use and disclose PHI to evaluate the treatment and services you receive and the performance of our staff in caring for you, provider training, underwriting activities, compliance and risk management activities, planning and development, and management and administration of Thomas Hospital. Other examples of health care operations include disclosures of PHI to doctors, nurses, technicians, students, attorneys, consultants, accountants, and others for review and education purposes, to help make sure Thomas Hospital is complying with all applicable laws, and to help Thomas Hospital continue to provide health care to its patients at a high level of quality. In addition, under certain circumstances Thomas Hospital is permitted to disclose PHI to other health care providers and health plans for their health care operations, including their quality assessment and improvement activities, credentialing and peer review activities, and health care fraud and abuse detection or compliance.

These uses and disclosures may also be limited by the Alabama Requirements.

**Other Uses and Disclosures For Which Authorization is Not Required.** In addition to using or disclosing PHI for treatment, payment and health care operations, Thomas Hospital may use and disclose PHI without your written authorization under the following circumstances:

As Required by Law and Law Enforcement. Thomas Hospital may use or disclose PHI when required to do so by applicable law. Thomas Hospital also may disclose PHI (but only under certain circumstances) when ordered to do so in a judicial or administrative proceeding, to identify or locate a suspect, fugitive, material witness, or missing person, when dealing with gunshot and other wounds, about criminal conduct, to report a crime, the location of the crime or victims, or the identity, description, or location of a person who committed a crime, or for other law enforcement purposes.

For Public Health Activities and Public Health Risks. Thomas Hospital may disclose PHI (but only under certain circumstances) to government officials in charge of collecting information about births and deaths, preventing and controlling disease, reports of child abuse or neglect and of other victims of abuse, neglect, or domestic violence, reactions to medications or product defects or problems, or to notify a person who may have been exposed to a communicable disease or may be at risk of contracting or spreading a disease or condition and other similar activities permitted by law.

For Health Oversight Activities. Thomas Hospital may disclose PHI to the government for oversight activities authorized by law, such as audits, investigations, inspections, licensure or disciplinary actions, and other proceedings, actions or activities necessary for monitoring the health care system, government programs, and compliance with civil rights laws.

Coroners, Medical Examiners, and Funeral Directors. Thomas Hospital may disclose PHI to coroners and medical examiners (and may use PHI if acting in those capacities) for the purpose of identifying a decedent, determining a cause of death, or otherwise as necessary to enable these parties to carry out their duties consistent with applicable law. In addition, Thomas Hospital may disclose PHI to a funeral director as permitted by law and as needed to carry out his or her duties.

Organ, Eye, and Tissue Donation. Thomas Hospital may release PHI to organ procurement organizations to facilitate organ, eye, and tissue donation and transplantation.

Research. Under certain circumstances, Thomas Hospital may use and disclose PHI for medical research purposes.

To Avoid a Serious Threat to Health or Safety. Under certain circumstances, Thomas Hospital may use and disclose PHI to law enforcement personnel or other appropriate persons to prevent or lessen a serious threat to the health or safety of a person or the public.

Specialized Government Functions. Thomas Hospital may use and disclose PHI of military personnel and veterans under certain circumstances. Thomas Hospital may also disclose PHI to authorized federal officials for intelligence,

counterintelligence, and other national security activities, and for the provision of protective services to the President or other authorized persons or foreign heads of state or to conduct special investigations. If you are an inmate of a correctional institution or under the custody of a law enforcement official, Thomas Hospital may disclose your PHI to the correctional institution or official in certain circumstances.

**Workers' Compensation.** Thomas Hospital may disclose PHI to comply with workers' compensation or other similar laws. These programs provide benefits for work-related injuries or illnesses.

**Fundraising Activities.** In certain circumstances, some of your PHI may be used or disclosed to a related foundation or business associate to contact you in an effort to raise money for Thomas Hospital. The money raised in connection with these activities would be used to expand and support Thomas Hospital's provision of health care and related services to the community.

**Appointment Reminders; Health-related Benefits and Services; Marketing.** Thomas Hospital may use and disclose your PHI to contact you and remind you of an appointment at Thomas Hospital, or to inform you of treatment alternatives or other health-related benefits and services that may be of interest to you, such as disease management programs. Thomas Hospital may use and disclose your PHI to encourage you to purchase or use a product or service through a face-to-face communication or by giving you a promotional gift of nominal value without obtaining your express authorization.

**Disclosures to You or for HIPAA Compliance Investigations.** Thomas Hospital may disclose your PHI to you or to your personal representative (who generally is someone who has the legal authority to act on your behalf), and is required to do so in connection with your rights described below. Thomas Hospital also must disclose your PHI to the Secretary of the United States Department of Health and Human Services (the "Secretary") when requested by the Secretary in order to investigate the compliance of Thomas Hospital with HIPAA.

These uses and disclosures may also be limited by the Alabama Requirements.

**Uses and Disclosures That May be Made With Your Agreement or Opportunity to Object.** You will have the opportunity to agree or object to these uses and disclosures of PHI that Thomas Hospital may make:

**Patient Directories.** Unless you object, Thomas Hospital may use some of your PHI to maintain a directory of individuals at Thomas Hospital. This information may include your name, your location in the facility, your general condition (*e.g.* fair, stable, etc.), and your religious affiliation (which will only be disclosed to members of the clergy). Except for your religious affiliation, the information may be disclosed to other persons who ask for you by name. Under limited circumstances, we may use your PHI for facility directory purposes in certain emergency situations.

**Disclosures to Individuals Involved in Your Health Care or Payment for Your Health Care.** Unless you object, Thomas Hospital may disclose some of your PHI to a family member, other relative, friend, or other persons you identify. Thomas Hospital may also notify those people about your location or condition. When you are unable to agree or object, Thomas Hospital may still disclose your PHI in certain circumstances.

These uses and disclosures may also be limited by the Alabama Requirements.

**Uses and Disclosures of PHI For Which Authorization is Required.** Other types of uses and disclosures of your PHI not described in this Notice will be made only with your written authorization, which you have the right, with some limitations, to revoke in writing.

**Regulatory Requirements.** Thomas Hospital is required by law to maintain the privacy of your PHI, to provide individuals with notice of its legal duties and privacy practices with respect to PHI, and to abide by the terms described in this Notice. (That is, the version that is currently in effect.) Thomas Hospital reserves the right to change the terms of this Notice and of its privacy policies, and to make the new terms applicable to all of the PHI it maintains. Before Thomas Hospital makes an important change to its privacy policies, it will promptly revise this Notice and post a new Notice in all applicable areas and on Thomas Hospital's website.

**Individual Rights.** You have the following rights regarding your PHI:

- You may request that Thomas Hospital restrict the use and disclosure of your PHI. Thomas Hospital is not required to agree to any restrictions you request, but if Thomas Hospital does so it will be bound by the restrictions to which it agrees except in certain emergency situations.
- You have the right to request that communications of PHI to you from Thomas Hospital be made by particular means or at particular locations. For instance, you might request that communications be made at your work address, or by e-mail rather than regular mail. Your requests must be made in writing and sent to our Privacy Officer. Thomas

Hospital will accommodate your reasonable requests.

- Generally, you have the right to inspect and copy your PHI that Thomas Hospital maintains, provided that you make your request in writing to our Privacy Officer. If you request copies of your PHI, Thomas Hospital may impose a reasonable fee to cover copying, postage, and related costs. Thomas Hospital may deny access in certain circumstances. If Thomas Hospital denies access to your PHI, it will explain the basis for denial and whether you have an opportunity to have your request and the denial reviewed by a licensed health care professional (who was not involved in the initial denial decision). If Thomas Hospital does not maintain the PHI you request and if it knows where that PHI is located, it will tell you how to redirect your request.
- If you believe that your PHI maintained by Thomas Hospital contains an error or needs to be updated, you have the right to request that Thomas Hospital correct or supplement your PHI. Your request must be made in writing to our Privacy Officer, and it must explain why you are requesting an amendment to your PHI. In certain circumstances, you have the right to amend your PHI. We may deny your request in certain circumstances.
- You generally have the right to request and receive a list of certain disclosures of your PHI Thomas Hospital has made at any time during the six (6) years prior to the date of your request (provided that such a list would not include disclosures made prior to April 14, 2003). You should submit any such request to the Medical Records Department. Thomas Hospital will provide the first list to you at no charge. For additional lists, Thomas Hospital will notify you of the cost involved and you may choose to withdraw or modify your request at that time before any costs are incurred to you.
- You have the right to receive a paper copy of this notice upon request, even if you have agreed to receive this notice electronically. You can receive a copy of this notice at our Web site, [www.thomashospital.com](http://www.thomashospital.com). To obtain a paper copy of this notice, please contact our Privacy Officer.
- You may complain to Thomas Hospital if you believe your privacy rights with respect to your PHI have been violated by contacting our Director of Quality Management and submitting a written complaint. Thomas Hospital will in no manner penalize you or retaliate against you for filing a complaint regarding Thomas Hospital's privacy practices. You also have the right to file a complaint with the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services.

If you have any questions about this notice, please contact Wanda Winfree, Director of Quality Management at 750 Morphy Avenue, Fairhope, Alabama 36533, (251) 990-1607, [wwinfree@thomashospital.com](mailto:wwinfree@thomashospital.com).

Effective Date: April 14th, 2003