

Slack Clinical Use Guidelines for Western Health



Digital Health
CONNECTING BEST CARE

Digital Health
Quick Reference Guide

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Guide

This guide is intended to provide clinicians with best practices for utilising Slack as the secure messaging platform at Western Health. The primary objective is to enhance communication and collaboration among clinicians while maintaining strict adherence to healthcare data security regulations at Western Health.

1.2 Why Choose Slack for Secure Clinical Messaging

Slack is the preferred choice over other instant messaging platforms, such as WhatsApp, for secure clinical instant messaging.

- Slack is preferred as it has undergone **cybersecurity testing** at Western Health.
- Slack stores its **data, including patient information, in Australia.**
- Slack offers useful **team collaboration tools**, including audio and video calls.
- Slack serves as an **adjunct tool** for non-urgent clinical communication.
- Slack is **not intended to replace pagers or phone calls.**

These features collectively provide a secure and compliant environment for communication and collaboration within Western Health.

2. Best Practices for Clinician-Clinician Communication

2.1 Messaging Etiquette

- **Use Slack for Non-Urgent Communication:**

Slack is best suited for non-urgent discussions, general updates, and collaborative tasks. It should not be used as a substitute for urgent communication methods like pagers or phone calls.

- **Closing the Communication Loop:**

Sending a message does not automatically imply responsibility on the recipient's part. Message receipt is confirmed only when the recipient replies or acknowledges it.

To ensure clear communication, it is highly advisable for the recipient to respond and acknowledge the message when ready, thus closing the communication loop.

If the sender does not receive a response within their expected timeframe, they should consider alternative methods to contact the recipient.

- **Handling Incorrect Messages:**

In the event of sending an incorrect message, the sender should promptly send a follow-up message explaining that the previous message should be disregarded. Similarly, if the recipient receives an incorrect message, they should inform the sender of the error.

- **Referrals:**

Referrals between clinicians should be initiated via pagers or phone calls. Subsequent communications may transition to Slack if both clinicians prefer and agree to use the platform. However, any discussions related to patient care must also be formally documented in the EMR.

- **Clinical Handover:**

Slack should not be the sole method for clinical handovers. Clinicians should also arrange personal meetings or phone calls as follow-ups. This ensures that the recipient comprehends the patient's context and care instructions.

- **Clinical Photography:**

At the time of writing, Western Health does not endorse the practice of capturing and transmitting clinical photographs through Slack. Western Health is actively exploring solutions to address the challenges associated with extensive clinical data storage and privacy compliance. Western Health will promptly communicate any updates and guidelines related to clinical photography to clinicians.

- **Emergency and Urgent Situations:**

In critical or emergency situations, always rely on established protocols and alternative, direct communication methods to ensure an immediate response and patient safety.

- **Accurate Patient Identifications:**

When using Slack, accurately identify patients by including their patient identifiers, such as name, MRN, DOB, and ward location, following the Western Health policy.

- **Communication Professionalism**

Slack is intended for use in a professional work setting. **When discussing patients, maintaining professionalism in style, tone, and content in all messages** is essential. Refer to Page 17 of the [Western Health Employee Handbook.pdf \(westernhealth.org.au\)](#) for further information.

- **Respect Working Hours:**

Avoid sending non-urgent messages during colleagues' off-duty hours. Respect their work-life balance to prevent unnecessary interruptions.

2.2 Documentation in EMR

- **Record Clinical Information:**

While Slack is a convenient communication tool, **Slack does not replace formal documentation in the Electronic Medical Record (EMR)**. If a conversation involves changes to clinical management or contains relevant clinical information or advice, ensure it is documented in the patient's EMR for record-keeping.

3. Patient consultation

Clinicians should be sensitive to how their use of a smartphone and instant messaging platform in the presence of patients and their families may be interpreted.

In situations where Slack is used in the presence of patients and their families, clinicians should provide context for its use, explaining how it enhances communication and coordination among healthcare teams.

If patients or their families enquire about the use of Slack, clinicians should be prepared to reassure them, highlighting Slack's security measures, data encryption, and its exclusive accessibility within Western Health, ensuring patient privacy and data security.