

Traverse Area Pediatric and Adolescent Clinic



Dear Traverse Area Pediatrics Patient/Family,

Many patients have asked why we are collecting more demographic information this year. Our motivation is reflective of nationwide initiatives to improve patient care. As always, we are obligated by HIPAA privacy laws to use this private information for internal purposes only and not share with other entities unless it is integral to the delivery of your healthcare, or if we have explicitly received your permission to share.

It is voluntary on your part to provide answers to these questions. If you maintain your own information on our patient portal, simply choose a response that indicates you prefer not to answer. It is important for us to distinguish between patients whom we did not give the opportunity to answer the questions, versus those who chose not to provide a response.

Q. Why are we asking about race and ethnicity?

A. Many studies demonstrate disparities in the delivery of healthcare to different racial and ethnic groups. Programs across the country are looking to address these gaps in care. This can only be done if we have better knowledge of where these inequalities exist.

Some race/ethnicities are more vulnerable to certain diseases, and identifying those patients can help us improve care. For example, in the recent past there was a national shortage of vaccine for Haemophilus Influenzae Type b (Hib). We reserved the limited supply for those who were most vulnerable, which included some specific ethnic groups.

Q. Where did the categories of race and ethnicity come from?

A. The categories for race and ethnicity are based on standards published in the Federal Register and are mandated by Medicare/Medicaid "Meaningful Use" rules. This is very similar to the information you may have reported in a US Census survey. We understand that you may feel these categories do not apply to you, or may not be reflective of how you identify yourself, but we are required to follow these regulations without exception.

Q. Why are you asking about preferred language?

A. We know that sometimes medical information gets lost in translation between patients and medical staff. The first step in addressing any potential language problem is to identify what languages are preferred by our patients and parents.

Q. Why are you asking about contact preferences?

A. As technology advances, we know that patients have different preferences in how they would like to receive various kinds of information from our practice. The first step toward making improvements in patient communication is to collect preferences.

Q. I heard the government is involved in all of this. Is that true? Is my personal information safe?

A. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) earmarked substantial money for physicians and health systems to adopt electronic health record technology. As part of this program, practices that receive funding are mandated to collect certain information, including those outlined above. This information will be reported without personal identifying information. For example, we may report what percentage of our patients "self-declare" a certain race, ethnicity or preferred language – but not a list of exactly which patients are in each group. Only we will have access to the information that links a specific answer with you personally.

We believe this information allows us to provide better care, so we have chosen to collect it for those purposes.

Thank you for your assistance and please bring any additional questions or concerns to the attention of our staff.