Electronic Health Records – Purdue Healthcare Advisors helps hospitals and provider practices protect electronic data

INITIATIVE

At Heart City Health Center in Elkhart, Indiana, many kinds of evaluations are conducted for the more than 10,000 patients treated by this federally qualified health center. But for the last two years, a different sort of annual check-up has been happening: a risk assessment to evaluate how well the center’s electronic health record (EHR) system is keeping patient information safe and secure. In its role as one of 62 Regional Extension Centers nationwide, Purdue Healthcare Advisors (PHA) provides security risk assessments for Heart City and other small practices, health centers and hospitals throughout Indiana. These assessments help providers comply with the security objectives outlined in the EHR Meaningful Use program overseen by the Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT. They require PHA’s Health IT/Security Team to lead the center’s leadership and IT staff through a battery of questions to determine exactly how the staff is implementing privacy and security policies. A review of all written policies is conducted followed by a physical walkthrough of the facilities to evaluate the risks of disclosure of patient information at each step of the patient flow process from triage to patient reception, and so on. Risks also are evaluated from a workflow perspective: how are staff members accessing the EHR; how are passwords being protected; are monitors on desktops visible to passersby? The last step is an assessment of the computer operating system configuration from a security perspective. Finally, the staff is provided with a remediation plan that identifies vulnerabilities and prepares them for data breaches and audits.

IMPACT

For the healthcare industry, a computer data breach is very serious. It doesn’t just involve lost funds that can be replaced; it can involve patient social security numbers, medical histories, and psychiatric notes. Once sensitive electronic patient health information (ePHI) is lost, stolen or leaked to the Internet, it can spread faster than the best Facebook gossip and be cached, indexed and copied to a seemingly endless number of devices. Heart City’s Operations Manager, Fundisani Mangena notes that, as a health center with a limited IT staff, he has welcomed the support of Purdue in helping the center keep up with new rules and regulations governing privacy and security. “Purdue strikes the right balance between securing patient information and keeping the data readily available to clinicians to provide the best possible care,” Mangena said. Providers and hospitals that achieve the Meaningful Use standard receive federal incentive payments as reimbursement for existing EHR systems. Purdue Healthcare Advisors has assisted more than 2,200 Indiana providers and 30 hospitals as they move toward using their EHRs in meaningful ways. These clients can expect to receive more than $105 million in combined incentive payments over the life of the program.

Healthcare TAP is a partner with Regenstrief Center for Healthcare Engineering.