Included in this newsletter is guidance on various HIPAA-related topics that impact your everyday work life. Hopefully, it will help answer some of your questions about how HIPAA relates to your work.

Properly Identifying Individuals

In order to meet patient privacy and security requirements under HIPAA, the identity of individuals requesting information needs to be verified prior to disclosing protected health information.

Consider the following sample scenario:

Two patients enter a clinic for treatment purposes, their identities are verified and they are checked-in. The chart for each patient is sent to the provider. Each patient has the same first name. The patients are both in the lobby waiting for an appointment. When it is time for the patient to be seen by the doctor, the patient’s first name is called. One of the patients walks into the examination room. The other patient was on their cell phone and does not hear their name being called. This is the patient that should have responded. The patient is treated and the diagnosis and services are entered into the patient chart. A prescription is given based on the medical history of the patient and a patient label is placed on the prescription. A bill is generated and sent to the patient. The patient takes the prescription order to the Pharmacy and the prescription is filled. The patient consumes the prescription and has an allergic reaction to the medicine.

In this scenario,
- the identity of the patient was never validated after the initial check-in process,
- All other staff assumed that the patient’s identity was validated at the beginning of the process,
- incorrect information was entered into another patient’s chart,
- an error was made in prescribing a drug,
- a bill indicating treatment was sent to the wrong patient, and
- information regarding another patient’s treatment was disclosed to an other patient.

What we can learn from this scenario is that NOT properly identifying patients at each step in the process, provides the opportunity for information and/or treatment errors. The HIPAA Privacy Compliance Office has provided Communication Guidelines that specify proper procedures for the identification of individuals.

When an individual requests information related to their treatment or payment for healthcare:
Confirm the identity of the individual by asking for their:
  - Full name (first, middle initial, last name),
  - PUID (if a Purdue student or employee) and
  - Date of birth.

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Where can I find the latest forms and other information about HIPAA?

The HIPAA Privacy Compliance Office has developed a website for Purdue staff to access forms and other HIPAA-related information. To access the site, please visit: http://www.purdue.edu/hipaa or contact:
Joan Vaughan, Director, HIPAA Privacy Compliance
telephone: (765) 496-1927
e-mail: jvaughan@purdue.edu

From the Director

HIPAA Privacy Assessments were conducted in each of the covered components this summer and security assessments are progressing.

Also, several new covered components have been identified. The following will be covered by HIPAA as of 9/30/2008: HR Operations, Accounts Payable, Payroll & Tax, HFS Human Resources Office, Calumet Budgets and Payrolls, and Calumet Academic Computing. On 10/6/2008, the Bursar’s office and University Collections-Loans will be covered, as well

Have a great fall!
Communicating with a Patient’s Family, Friends, or Others Involved in the Patient’s Care

The Office for Civil Rights (OCR), which enforces compliance with the HIPAA Privacy Rule, has published guidance that explains when a health care provider is allowed to share a patient’s health information with the patient’s family members, friends, or others, identified by the patient, as involved in the patient’s care under the HIPAA Privacy Rule. Following, is the first of a series of questions and answers that were provided by OCR to illustrate appropriate handling of information under different circumstances. To read the guidance in its entirety, please access: http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/hipaa/provider_ffg.pdf

**Question:**

If the patient is present and has the capacity to make health care decisions, when does HIPAA allow a health care provider to discuss the patient’s health information with the patient’s family, friends, or others involved in the patient’s care or payment for care?

**Answer:**

If the patient is present and has the capacity to make health care decisions, a health care provider may discuss the patient’s health information with a family member, friend, or other person if the patient agrees or, when given the opportunity, does not object. A health care provider also may share information with these persons if, using professional judgment, he or she decides that the patient does not object. In either case, the health care provider may share or discuss only the information that the person involved needs to know about the patient’s care or payment for care.

Here are some examples:

- **An emergency room doctor may discuss a patient’s treatment in front of the patient’s friend if the patient asks that her friend come into the treatment room.**

- **A doctor’s office may discuss a patient’s bill with the patient’s adult daughter who is with the patient at the patient’s medical appointment and has questions about the charges.**

- **A doctor may discuss the drugs a patient needs to take with the patient’s health aide who has accompanied the patient to a medical appointment.**

- **A doctor may give information about a patient’s mobility limitations to the patient’s sister who is driving the patient home from the hospital.**

- **A nurse may discuss a patient’s health status with the patient’s brother if she informs the patient she is going to do so and the patient does not object.**

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