

# Protecting the Information of Millions ... One Person at a Time

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*by Anne Zender, MA, vice president of communications*

As privacy officer with TRICARE Management Activity (TMA), the Department of Defense's office that manages the military's worldwide healthcare program, TRICARE, Sam Jenkins, CHE, takes his role seriously.

What we do in privacy and security is extremely important, not only to our health plan but to the patient's information we protect, says Jenkins, a retired Navy commander who has been with TMA for five years. I like to think that we protect the health information of our 9.2 million beneficiaries one at a time.

"We have a very good HIPAA program, and we would like to show the world just how good it is."

—Sam Jenkins, CHE

## Policies and Beyond

As part of his privacy officer role, Jenkins is involved in an extensive policy review and revision project. This is no small feat for the Military Health System (MHS)—an organization with more than 800 treatment facilities and a work force of more than 130,000 located around the world. The goal: to establish a process in which all health information policies are regularly analyzed and reviewed or improved as necessary, while ensuring accountability and clarifying compliance requirements.

Beyond establishing policies, conducting training is important, too. We want to train our work force to make them aware of the policies and compliance that are their responsibilities to meet, Jenkins says. People make mistakes, not maliciously, but from a lack of information. In many cases where an incident occurs, we find it could have been prevented had appropriate policies been implemented and employees well trained on the requirements of those policies.

A 2006 AHIMA survey reported that HIM professionals are finding it difficult to keep HIPAA in the spotlight at their organizations. To ensure ongoing compliance at the TMA headquarters, Jenkins has instituted an internal awareness campaign with automatic reminders. He also is revamping employee orientations to remind people about privacy and security requirements that are theirs to comply with for the protection of data. Jenkins says, As a data-laden organization, we rely on our data and we must have a work force that helps us protect it.

In addition to educating others, Jenkins says he's always learning—rereading the HIPAA rule, brushing up on industry interpretations, and developing lessons learned policy papers as the organization works through real-life implementation issues.

## To Comply and to Measure

In addition to ensuring compliance, Jenkins also seeks to measure it. His team has developed a program to measure HIPAA compliance across the MHS enterprise. So far, he says, they have devised 58 metrics that measure compliance with various policies. Much of the information will be collected electronically from tools that already exist. In the next one to two years, the goal is to create a dashboard of metrics to reflect information pertinent to the different levels of responsibility across the MHS organization.

The metrics will tell us where our policies and procedures are in place, Jenkins says. We intend to look for trends, facilities that are having difficulty meeting the requirements of our policies as well as facilities that demonstrate solid implementation and understanding. This process of metrics and analysis will help us to help those who most need assistance.

It's all part of Jenkins' mission: to ensure the privacy and security of individual health information. It's important to demonstrate to our beneficiaries that we care about the protection of their personal and health information, he says.

Besides earning the confidence of patients and their families, he uses stories of the MHS's work to keep the HIPAA banner flying among his healthcare colleagues as well. I carry a message about our success to people--to say you, too, can be successful, Jenkins says.

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