

Renewed Focus on HIPAA

[Save to myBoK](#)

by **Meg Featheringham**, assistant editor

At Upstate Carolina Medical Center, HIM director and privacy officer Harolyn B. Acklin, MBA, RHIA, is getting a crash course in privacy investigations.

Although she's only been in the position for a little over a year, Acklin has had to deal with her fair share of privacy complaints. "For last year, 2008, I probably had, ballpark figure, around 10," she says of the number of HIPAA complaints she had to investigate.

"We are owned by a corporation that's based in Naples, Florida, and the compliance and HIPAA officer occasionally sends out e-mails to all the HIM managers, and the corporate HIPAA officer has said in several e-mails that [the number of HIPAA complaints] seems to be increasing."

One of the reasons for the increased number of complaints has to do with staff using camera phones. "Unfortunately, some staff see something unusual and use their camera phone to take pictures of it, which is a HIPAA violation," she says. "There were several of these complaints concerning the camera phones, so the corporate office asked all the HIPAA officers to make sure that they had a HIPAA policy regarding the camera phones in place."

Brushing up on HIPAA

Part of her role as privacy officer includes reviewing state and federal rules regarding privacy, as well as educating the Upstate staff on HIPAA guidelines. "We're going through the training right now," she says. "Every year we have an annual HIPAA compliance training." Employees can either take the course online or in person.

Acklin includes current headlines in the class to make sure employees understand the importance of maintaining a patient's privacy. "I tell them some incidents that I've read about in magazines of movie stars who have gone to the hospital and had so many people looking at their records they had to terminate a large number of staff because it wasn't part of their job to access the stars' files," she says.

"I say, 'Just think if that was you. How would you like someone to look at your records and see that you had a sensitive surgery? You wouldn't want people to know that.'"

Her facility also sends e-mails regarding any new rules or regulations that come out to make sure that staff are upholding all state and federal HIPAA guidelines, along with providing HIPAA training to all new HIM managers within a month of their hire. The training is done at the corporate office in Naples, FL.

E-Signatures and EHRs to Come

Acklin's other job responsibilities include planning, organizing, and managing the daily operations of the HIM department. One of her current projects is obtaining electronic signatures for all transcribed reports. It's still a work in progress as she deals with getting the IT component implemented.

Once e-signatures are in place, Acklin believes the delinquency rate will decrease. Since she has been at Upstate, she has decreased the delinquency rate by 20 percent and wants to get it even lower.

Also on the horizon for Upstate and Acklin is an electronic health record (EHR) system. HMA, the corporation that owns Upstate, is slowly rolling out EHRs to its hospitals.

“They have piloted the program for the electronic records in 10 to 15 facilities,” Acklin says. “They’re trying to make sure all the bugs are ironed out. Every two or three months they add another hospital. We’re probably about a year out on the list because we’re such a small facility.”

Article citation:

Featheringham, Meg. "Renewed Focus on HIPAA" *Journal of AHIMA* 80, no.2 (February 2009): 74.

Driving the Power of Knowledge

Copyright 2022 by The American Health Information Management Association. All Rights Reserved.