

“HIPAA PRIVACY FOR EMPLOYERS” PUBLISHED

New Tool Simplifies Client HIPAA Compliance

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In a bit of good news for those concerned with the privacy of their confidential medical information, the HIPAA act of 1996, which regulates the electronic transmittal of health information, has finally gone into effect. The bad news? *All* healthcare providers must comply with a series of complex, almost labyrinthine, criteria.

But there's more good news. A couple of forward-thinking companies have created and published a compressive guide to HIPAA compliance, allowing even very small companies to effectively meet the terms of the new regulation without tearing out their hair ... or limiting the terms of their policies.

HIPAA, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 <<http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/hipaa>>, became effective on April 14, 2003. The Act includes regulations that protect private health information transmitted in a “HIPAA transaction,” identified as the electronic transmission of information to carry out financial or administrative activities related to health care.

Basically, the Act states that “a covered entity may not use or disclose protected health information (“PHI”) without a valid authorization.” Individually identifiable health information includes demographic information a covered entity collects from any individual. PHI relates to the past, present or future physical or mental health or condition of an individual, the provision of health care to an individual or the payment for the provision of health care to an individual.

In other words, PHI is any information about patients, their medical history and any payments they've made regarding their health care. A very specific set of regulations now applies to the electronic transmittal of any of this information. Although it's essential for healthcare providers to safeguard this information, enactment of HIPAA means representatives of covered entities must learn and practice a completely new set of regulations.

The term “covered entity” applies not only to hospitals, HMOs and doctor's offices, but also to employers, healthcare providers, health plan administrators or health care clearinghouses. For small businesses that employ only limited Human Resources personnel, compliance with HIPAA regulations can severely cut into productivity and company resources, as plan administrators scramble to make the major changes HIPAA requires in information-handling processes.

Fortunately, a new resource can simplify HIPAA compliance for healthcare plan administrators, enabling your clients to get up to speed on HIPAA regulations quickly and efficiently. Privacy Council (www.privacycouncil.com), the global resource for

privacy and data protection services, and Littler Mendelson (www.littler.com), the country's largest employment and labor law firm, have jointly published *HIPAA Privacy for Employers*, a definitive resource for employers sponsoring health benefit plans.

Few employers truly understand the complex privacy challenge they face with these new regulations, including the penalties that accompany non-compliance. *HIPAA Privacy for Employers* is designed to bridge that gap, providing clients who have self-administered or partially insured health-related benefit plans with the tools and information they need to understand and comply with the HIPAA's Privacy Rule.

"For the past few years, most of the information and guidance on HIPAA and the Privacy Rule was focused on healthcare organizations, and employers not only were unaware that they would have to comply with the HIPAA Privacy Rule if they self-administered their benefit plans, or had a partially insured health benefits plan ... but they also did not have the knowledge about the HIPAA Privacy Rule, nor the tools, to effectively comply," said Gary Clayton, co-author of the guide and founder of Privacy Council.

The guide examines the details of how HIPAA applies to real-life businesses, explaining to employers how to build these complicated new regulations into the way they do business. More than just a compliance guide, *HIPAA Privacy for Employers* is a strategic approach to privacy management and enables plan administrators to build competitive benefits packages and enhance workplace trust.

HIPAA Privacy for Employers costs \$250 and can be purchased online through Privacy Council <www.privacycouncil.com/hipaa_pEmployers.php> or Littler Mendelson <www.littler.com/hipaa_order.htm>.