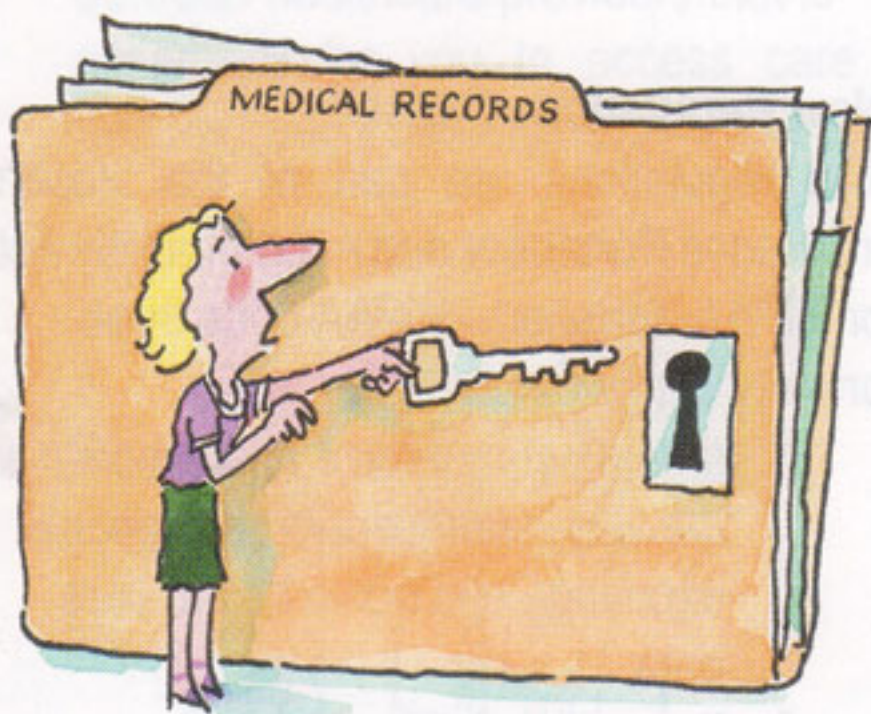


Protecting Your Health Information

What you need to know about the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act



Identity theft. Credit card fraud. Computer viruses. Concern for the privacy and security of personal information, has never been greater. Our concern for the safety and security of your personal healthcare information has never been taken more seriously.

While we have always gone to great lengths to ensure the privacy of your personal health information, we will soon be getting additional help from the Federal Government in the form of new regulations. These regulations will help standardize privacy and security requirements across the country and across all different types of healthcare organizations.

New Regulations Passed

The regulations are part of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act or HIPAA, for short. HIPAA does three primary things:

1. It helps standardize and simplify the way healthcare organizations exchange electronic health care data.
2. It provides consumers with additional protections for getting and maintaining health insurance coverage; although, it does not guarantee coverage.

3. It creates new security rules to ensure the safety and privacy of individual health information and medical records.

HIPAA Ensures the Privacy and Security of Individual Health Information

Currently, individual state laws govern use and disclosure of this information, creating many inconsistencies and gaps in the way your health information is protected. HIPAA sets minimum security and privacy standards for healthcare organizations to follow. If a state has more stringent privacy and security laws, then those would be followed instead. In addition, HIPAA sets heavy penalties for violations of these standards and the misuse of personal health information.

Defining Individual Health Information

Every time you go to see a doctor, are admitted to a hospital, fill a prescription or send a claim to an insurance company, a record is made of your confidential health information. This type of information is referred to as individually identifiable health information and is the type of information regulated by HIPAA. It can be in any format – electronic, paper or oral.

Healthcare organizations that collect and manage this type of information and are therefore covered by these regulations including physicians, physical therapists, mental health professionals, dentists, chiropractors, optometrist, podiatrists and others; hospitals; health plans; employers; healthcare clearinghouses such as claims processors; and other healthcare organizations who conduct administrative and financial transactions.

Added Control Over Health Information

Under HIPAA, you have new rights to understand and control how your health information is used:

- **Right to education** – Healthcare providers and health plans are required to provide you with a clear written explanation of how they intend to use and disclose your information
- **Right to access medical records** – You have the right to see and get copies of your medical records, request changes and receive a history of non-routine disclosures of your personal health information.

- **Right to consent** – Healthcare providers are required to obtain prior consent before sharing personal health information for purposes *other than* treatment, payment and healthcare operations.
- **Right to Recourse** – You have the right to file a formal complaint if you believe that violations of the regulations were made.

In general, HIPAA tries to find a balance between protecting your privacy and allowing the appropriate flow of information between healthcare providers that is necessary for you to access care and receive quality healthcare services.



Want to learn more?

For a copy of our practice privacy protections, please ask the receptionist at the front desk.

The following websites may also contain helpful information on HIPAA:

American Medical Association
 American Dental Association
 American Chiropractic Association
 American Optometric Association
 American Podiatric Medical Association
 American Academy of Ophthalmology

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