



How to Master the HIPAA Concerns of Small to Medium Medical Businesses and Practices

HIPAA compliance is serious business for many medical practice or medical business. Failure to properly safeguard patient medical records can result in fines or other sanctions that can easily destroy a practice or business that your customer has spent years, if not decades, building. HIPAA compliance is especially critical for your small or medium-sized customers. While larger practices or businesses may have the financial means to weather a HIPAA violations, smaller ones may have no choice but to close down in the face of HIPAA fines.

Compliance is especially critical now due to recent crackdowns on violators by the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) in the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services.

Fortunately, there are a few measures your clients can take to ensure that they are HIPAA compliant.

Use common sense: Most HIPAA violations occur when providers or their employees simply fail to execute simple, basic, common-sense caution when dealing with confidential medical information. For instance, if you use an online billing system, make sure to enforce strong password rules for both providers and patients. Also – again, this is common sense, but is an alarmingly common problem – make sure employees never, under any circumstances, keep a written password list at their desk, or even worse, write passwords on Post-it notes and attach them to their monitor.

Train your staff: HIPAA guidelines require that all staff be properly training in the handling of protected health information (PHI). Make sure your staff is adequately trained, and re-train as needed to keep them on the right track. All staff members need to know what information they are allowed to see, what they may or may not say when dealing with patients, computer security and password rules, and so on. Provide annual refresher training and make sure you document all training.

Establish written protocols for accessing PHI: Staff should have clear, written guidelines on exactly what PHI they are allowed to see and what they are not allowed to see.

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Use discretion in reception or other public areas: Instruct staff on exactly what information they are allowed to discuss in reception or other public areas where it may be overheard by other parties. Never use public sign-in sheets, which is yet another all-too-common problem seen in many practices and medical facilities. No patient should be able to tell what other patients are signed in or who they are signed in to see. This also means that patients should not be called by full name or last name.

Hire an expert: If at all possible, hire an experienced outside HIPAA consultant. They will be able to bring their experience with what works – and does not work – to bear in helping you put together a proper HIPAA compliance plan. HIPAA compliance can be complicated, and calling in an expert can help you navigate the many pitfalls that you may encounter on your way to full compliance.

HIPAA compliance is a serious matter. However, by following these tips – and adding a healthy dose of common sense – your customers should be able master the skills they need to be fully HIPAA compliant.

[Contact us](#) for more tips on how to help conquer your HIPAA challenges.



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