

Part B Insider (Multispecialty) Coding Alert

Physician Note: Tricare HIPAA Breach Could Affect 4.9 Million Patients

Plus: One MAC may have overpaid you for your PQRS participation.

Recent spotlights on HIPAA breaches have shown just how many people can be impacted by one privacy slip-up, and the latest example of that puts an exclamation point on the issue. Tricare, the massive U.S. military insurer, announced last week that backup tapes from an electronic health care record went missing while in the possession of a contractor, putting about 4.9 million San Antonio-area military clinic and hospital patients at risk of a privacy breach.

According to the statement, the information on the tapes included patient data from 1992 through Sept. 7, 2011, and "may include Social Security numbers, addresses and phone numbers, and some personal health data such as clinical notes, laboratory tests, and prescriptions." However, the tapes contained no financial data.

Despite the sensitive information stored on the missing tapes, the government ranks the risk of harm to patients as low because anyone attempting to access the data would have to be proficient in specific hardware and software systems. The government will not be notifying all patients who have been identified as being on the tapes, and will not provide credit monitoring and restoration services, due to the low risk that the government has assigned to the situation.

For more information, visit www.tricare.mil/mybenefit/Download/Forms/DataBreach_PublicStatement.pdf.