

## Psychiatry Coding & Reimbursement Alert

### Reader Question: Avoid PHI Compromise Using These Simple Measures

**Question:** In the recent past, we have had to face problems in our practice due to Health Insurance Portability & Accountability Act (HIPAA) violations. Amongst these violations, we had a breach in personal health information (PHI) due to hacking. How do we safeguard this information from hacking so that it does not fall into the wrong hands?

Maryland Subscriber

**Answer:** Many practices like yours have been the target of hackers in the recent past and this menace is on the rise with no signs of letdown. But, you can adopt some basic measures to ensure that the personal health information (PHI) of your patients does not fall into the wrong hands.

According to Medical Mutual Liability Insurance of Maryland (MMLIM), these hacks are often pretty basic. "Hackers are often looking for the path of least resistance. Some popular methods are exploiting a user profile with a weak password, using malware, or a software exploit," MMLIM reports.

Some of the basic measures suggested by MMLIM that you can adopt in your practice includes:

- Change passwords regularly. "Cracking weak passwords is one of the easiest ways to hack a system. ... Just make sure that your master password is very difficult, and change that regularly," MMLIM reports.
- Don't disable firewalls. A hardware firewall appliance is also a good way to restrict traffic on your network, according to MMILM.
- Keep up-to-date antimalware. You can keep your systems safe from hackers by installing the latest of malware scanners and antivirus software.
- Update software frequently. "This will go a long way to patching vulnerabilities on your devices," according to MMILM.

**Resources:** For a look at the OIG news release about the June 2016 Healthcare Fraud Takedown, visit <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/national-health-care-fraud-takedown-results-charges-against-301-individuals-approximately-900>.

For links to the OIG 2016 National Health Care Fraud Takedown factsheet, graphs, pictures, and more, visit <http://oig.hhs.gov/newsroom/media-materials/2016/takedown.asp>.