

Eli's Hospice Insider

HIPAA: Hospice Paper Record Breach Plagues National Chain

Highway record dump makes the news.

HIPAA penalties aren't the only possible damage from a slip with patients' protected health information. Bad publicity, which could affect your credibility with referral sources and potential patients, is another possible consequence of a HIPAA breach.

Case in point: Records for 17 **Amedisys** hospice patients from 2010 were found blowing around the side of a highway in Butler, Tenn., according to press reports. The records listed PHI including medical conditions, personal information, patient identification numbers and other private patient details, as well as bank account information and more, says **WJHL News**.

"Amedisys takes ethics and regulatory compliance very seriously and we are disappointed that this incident has taken place," an Amedisys spokesperson reportedly told the news station. "It appears that a small number of social work papers affecting 17 patients from 2010 out of our Elizabethton hospice care center were not properly disposed of as we normally require our staff to do. Our preliminary review of the documents suggests that all of the patient information was related to bereavement support and did not contain social security numbers, insurance numbers or other financial information."

"We believe that these files are associated with a single, former employee and therefore, we believe that this is an isolated incident. However, Amedisys is still investigating the specific circumstances about how this incident occurred, although we are confident that it is not reflective of our normal business practices," the rep said, according to WJHL.

"Our company's policy requires our employees to shred any paper documents after a patient's episode of care is completed, and it does not appear that this former employee followed our normal protocols. Nevertheless, we are doing everything we can to remediate this problem and reassure our patients and business partners," the rep continued.

"To that end, we have already started taking steps to address this problem, which includes notifying the affected patients' families as well as the proper authorities, which we are in the process of doing. We are also offering credit monitoring and identity theft protection services for those who have been affected, which is being undertaken at our cost. In addition, while we believe this was the result of a former employee, Amedisys is also providing additional HIPAA training for all staff in our Elizabethton hospice care center."