

Health Information Compliance Alert

Don't Let Front Desk Follies Bring Down Your Practice

Hint: Careless regard for organization and guidelines leads to HIPAA faux pas.

More often than not, the least experienced staff members end up checking patients in at the registration desk. These unseasoned employees make mistakes because they lack training and don't have any policies and procedures to refer to. As a result, HIPAA compliance can be compromised.

Consider these four tips to cut down on HIPAA risks in reception:

1. We've Got a File for that

Insist that your workers keep the front desk neat and tidy with organized files and ready information online, over the phone, and in person. Staff pen fumbles, misplaced or forgotten forms, and disconnected calls lead to errors and open the door for social engineers and breaches.

2. Sign, Seal, and Update to Avoid Problems Later

Make updating patient data a top priority. Every time a patient comes to your practice, the front desk's first task must be verifying information and insurance. Without these vital details, the opportunity for medical error, denied claims, and HIPAA violations rises. This is particularly important with patients who haven't been seen in awhile, so it is essential that staff do not let patients leave the office without updates to both the EHR and paper files.

3. Train Your Staff on Privacy Matters

By keeping tabs on your staff's ability to uphold privacy mandates, you also protect yourself and the practice's bottom line. By ranking HIPAA compliance education and management at the top of your practice to-do list, you invest in the safety and security of both your patients and your livelihood.

4. Utilize Staff to the Best of Their Abilities

Instead of loading your administrative staff at reception, give them specific office roles that suit their temperaments, education, and qualifications. It's always best to have a separate person for reception and scheduling, copying and filing, scribing, and billing. That way, everyone is busy ensuring that appointments are met and made, forms are filed and EHRs are updated, data is collected, bills are paid, and — most importantly — that you meet HIPAA compliance protocols.

Reminder: Most HIPAA violations are caused by human error. "Fix your people," says **Brand Barney, CISSP, HCISPP, QSA**, a security analyst with Security Metrics in Orem, Utah. Training is key as is a comprehensive understanding of the consequences.

"If you are breached and report it to HHS-OCR, they are going to want to know how and why you were breached," he warns. "And it can be painful. I certainly wouldn't want to have that conversation."