

Health Information Compliance Alert

Enforcement News: Healthcare Phone Scams Are on The Rise, HHS Says

Warn your patients to be on the lookout for scammers phishing for healthcare information.

Be wary of callers offering you prizes or cash for personal information or a down payment.

A woman in Jacksonville, Fla received a call last month from a caller posing as the HHS and asking for \$250 in return for a \$9,000 federal grant, an HHS release from April 17, 2017 suggested. Though the woman became suspicious and never went through with offering up the deposit, she did, however, give the scammer her name, address, and other personal data before hanging up.

The incident was not isolated due mainly to the number that showed up on caller ID, tricking thousands of "the OIG hotline phone number for reporting fraud (1-800-HHS-TIPS (1-800-447-8477))." What happened is called spoofing, "a malicious practice of making a phone number appear on caller ID to be legitimate in order to obtain confidential information," said **Thomas O'Donnell**, Assistant Inspector General for Investigations at HHS in the release. "Thousands of calls using the spoofed number were made to people across the nation, although only a handful of people have apparently sent money to the perpetrators."

The OCR recommends that providers update patients on their privacy rights under HIPAA, particularly in regard to medical identity theft. The release suggests patients review their social media sites and wearables often for ePHI exposure.

"People [should] not to be fooled by a caller's knowledge of their name and other personal information," O'Donnell advised. "Callers may use a variety of tactics to obtain some initial personal information, including by working for otherwise legitimate marketing centers ... the OIG will never initiate contact with the public through the hotline to request or confirm personal information."

Resource: For a complete review of the HHS release, visit <https://www.hhs.gov/blog/2017/04/14/spoofing-not-joke-thousands-hit-phone-scam.html>.