

## Health Information Compliance Alert

### Health Information Update: PSOs Get The Word Out On Patient Safety Data

HHS makes good on vow to provide better access to patient safety data.

The **Department of Health and Human Services** is working to help clinicians report patient safety events confidentially through its Patient Safety Organizations initiative, a press release on the HHS Web site announces.

PSOs are private groups authorized to collect and evaluate patient safety events that are reported by health care providers, states the news release. They are new and independent from any of the existing entities currently addressing health care quality and would provide a platform to the physicians and health care organization to discuss and analyze patient safety events without the fear of legal liability or sanctions.

Satisfy requirements: The PSO initiative came about as a result of the Patient Safety and Quality Improvement Act of 2005. Though the law makes patient safety event reporting privileged and confidential, it does not relieve clinicians or health care organizations from the responsibility of fulfilling the reporting requirements, which are there under federal, state or local laws, HHS emphasizes.

The **Institute of Medicine** has supported the establishment of PSOs with an aim to improve the quality and safety of healthcare, states the release. PSOs would reduce the fear of legal liability or sanctions associated with patient safety reporting and would encourage voluntary reporting.

Freeing up data: Under the proposal, PSOs will be authorized to collect, aggregate and analyze data and would help ensure a continuous and free flow of information on patient safety events among various clinicians and health care organizations. They would further provide feedback to the clinicians and health care organizations, which would help in the improvement of health care quality.

"Patient Safety Organizations will help make health care safer for all Americans," HHS Secretary **Mike Leavitt** said.- "By making it easier for patient safety events to be reported and the lessons learned from them to be shared more broadly, patients will ultimately receive safer health care."

HHS' **Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality** would monitor the rules for listing qualified PSOs.-The HHS **Office for Civil Rights** would look into the confidentiality provisions of the act. HHS will soon issue guidelines that would permit entities to be listed as PSOs, in accordance with the statute, before the publication of the final rule, the release states.

Safe haven: Clinicians and health care organizations want to improve patient care but are afraid of liability and sanctions, said AHRQ Director **Carolyn M. Clancy**, M.D.- "The proposed regulation provides a framework for Patient Safety Organizations to facilitate a shared-learning approach that supports effective interventions that reduce risk of harm to patients," she further added.

"It is essential to the success of this new voluntary reporting program that the information exchanged to address important patient safety issues remains privileged and confidential, added

Winston Wilkinson, OCR director. "Provider trust in our enforcement of strong confidential protections will encourage participation in the critical work of improving the understanding of the threats to patient safety and ultimately improving care for all patients."

The AHRQ will collect and analyze the non-identifiable data and would publish it in the AHRQ's annual National

Healthcare Quality Report. The published information would also include trends and patterns of patient safety events.-

Resource: For more information visit <http://www.hhs.gov/news/press/2008pres/02/20080212a.html>