

Health Information Compliance Alert

HIPAA Guidance OCR SEEKS HIPAA BEST, BRIGHTEST

In an effort to assist covered entities that are scrambling to meet the privacy rule's Apr. 14 compliance deadline, the Department of Health and Human Services Office for Civil Rights announced Jan. 13 that is seeking to hire several Privacy Program Specialists.

According to the job description posted by OCR, the Privacy Program Specialists will be engaged in a nationwide initiative "to provide outreach and public education on the Privacy Rule to increase awareness by covered entities of their responsibilities and by the public of their rights under the Rule."

Specifically, the privacy specialists are intended to educate entities and the public on HIPAA's privacy standards by responding to phone and written inquiries and by developing and delivering presentations at conferences, seminars, workshops and informal meetings.

Those recruited for the position also will be expected to serve as "subject matter experts on the HIPAA Privacy Rule" for other OCR and HHS personnel. The job posting announces that Specialists will provide "managers with advice and assistance on matters related to the development of plans, strategies, policies, initiatives or program improvements necessary to accomplish health information privacy mandates effectively and efficiently."

In addition to outlining the position's educational responsibilities, the description states that these Privacy Specialists will either conduct or assist "with conducting investigations according to OCR's authority under the Privacy Rule using informal and formal means to secure compliance."

The specialists will work out of HHS Regional Offices in Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Denver, Kansas City, New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco and Seattle, as well as its headquarters in Washington.

So how soon can entities expect to ring up their regional specialist with HIPAA privacy guidance questions? That's going to depend on the number of applicants and the length of the interview process, reports a senior HHS official.

"Practically speaking, if you have a very large pool, it's going to take you longer to get through all of the applicants than if you had a small pool," and the size of pool won't be known until the closing date for all applications, the official tells Eli. All applications must be received online via the job posting Web site before midnight on February 4, 2003.

The official could not comment on the number of privacy specialists that HHS hopes to hire.

Editor's note: For more information on OCR's Privacy Program Specialist position, go to www.hhs.gov/ocr/jobocr.htm.