

## Health Information Compliance Alert

### How Would You Handle It?

#### How to Work With a Talker

Read the situation below, and decide how you would handle it before you compare it to our experts' advice on page 87.

Situation: The receptionist who works with me is always commenting on the patients and their problems in the reception area.

She'll go outside for a smoke and then gossip about patients on the sidewalk. I don't want to get her into trouble, but I'm afraid she may be violating HIPAA and other laws with her careless chatter. Should I tell someone about her behavior?

Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_.

Here's what your peers recommended doing to handle the situation outlined on page 86:

**Solution:** Yes. You have a responsibility to help your office uphold its confidentiality policies. That means you have to respect patients' confidentiality yourself, but also make sure others respect it as well. So you have no choice but to report this co-worker's indiscretion to the office manager, preferably in writing.

**The truth:** Even if HIPAA weren't an issue at all, such behavior would still violate your office's confidentiality policies and open the door for lawsuits. Chances are when you started working in this office you signed a confidentiality policy or some other agreement regarding how you treat your patients' information.

Anytime you're in doubt about your responsibilities, you can look this policy over once again. But equally important, your coworker is acting unprofessionally and bringing disrepute on your office.

**The bottom line:** "Loose lips sink ships," say office managers and receptionists. If everyone in the office doesn't commit to keep patient information sacred, then the whole office will sink beneath fines, lawsuits and bad publicity.