

Health Information Compliance Alert

Industry News: New Site Helps You Avoid Communication Gaps

3 keys resources could keep you free of federal scrutiny.

Healthcare providers who encounter many patients with communication-related issues will need to check out a new OCR Web site.

Background: In December 2006, the **Office of Civil Rights** at the **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services** launched a new site designed to facilitate communication between healthcare providers and their patients. (To view the site, go to <http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/hospitalcommunication.html>.)

[This site aims specifically to help providers learn how to deal with patients with special communications needs, including patients with limited English proficiency or who are deaf or hard-of-hearing.](#)

Compliance angle: [Because it is illegal to discriminate on the basis of disability or national origin, a provider is expected to take what the OCR defines as "reasonable steps" to communicate effectively with patients with special needs and provide them with the same level of access to healthcare services.](#)

3 Resource Areas on Site

1. [The new website provides you with links to **relevant anti-discrimination laws and regulations**, including the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which prohibits programs receiving financial assistance from HHS from discriminating on the basis of disability.](#)

2. [The site also provides links to a variety of **educational materials** and information that describe how healthcare professionals can provide better service and access to those who present communication challenges.](#)

3. [You can also find information that is useful for the patient in these links; for example, this section includes a link to the OCR's fact sheet detailing **how to file a discrimination complaint** and summaries and information on past communication complaints and investigations.](#)