

Health Information Compliance Alert

Industry Note: HHS Seeks New Facebook App As Disaster Lifeline

In a move that takes on added significance in the wake of Hurricane Irene, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR) is turning to social networking to ease disaster relief.

The HHS and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) are issuing a challenge to developers to develop a new Facebook application by November 2011 to help ease communication between individuals and their healthcare providers during natural disasters, an Aug. 22 HHS press release reports.

The HHS points out in the press release that people keeping their friends and loved ones posted about their well being or otherwise through status updates on Facebook seems a common enough move these days. "After disasters, a tremendous number of people use Facebook to post and share information," said **Assistant Secretary Nicole Lurie, M.D.**, a rear admiral in the U.S. Public Health Service. "We're challenging our country's most innovative developers to create apps that help people use Facebook not only to reach out to friends and family for any kind of help they may need after emergency but also to become better prepared in the first place."

This application is intended to enable Facebook users "to invite three Facebook friends to become lifelines, points of contact who agree to act as a source of support during disasters such as providing transportation, a place to stay or anything else the Facebook friend may need," says the press release. "The ideal application includes a way for users to identify lifelines, to create and share a personal preparedness plan including health considerations with these lifelines, and to encourage others to use the application. Additional considerations include being easy to use on basic mobile devices, incorporating Geographic Information System (GIS) locating or tagging, and connecting with other social media and emergency relief technologies."

To register as a participant in the ASPR Lifeline Facebook Application Developer Challenge or learn more about it, visit <http://challenge.gov/challenges/220> or <http://www.health2challenge.org/2011/07/12/the-aspr-lifeline-facebook-application-challenge/>. www.hhs.gov/news/press/2011pres/08/20110822a.html

Your Employees' Facebook Posts Could Come Back To Haunt You

The last thing your practice needs is fallout from an employee turning to social media to blow off steam after working with your patients.

Think a HIPAA breach won't happen? Think again. A staffer of Westerly Hospital in Charlestown, R.I. took to her Facebook account to recount a few of her emergency room encounters. Though she was careful not to reveal any patient names, people still figured out who she was talking about, which is a breach of protected health information under HIPAA, according to a Rhode Island Department of Health press release. After realizing her mistake, the staff member shut down her account, but the damage had been done. She was fired from the hospital and forced to pay a \$500 administrative fee.

Lesson learned: Even if your clinicians have strict control on who can view their Facebook pages, their friends and family members will still have access to any content they post -- including any patient information they share. Coach your staffers to never take to social media when they need to deal with work stress.

Revalidate Your Direct Data Access Before It Is Too Late

If you miss this important letter, you could get shut out of the Medicare claims system. It's time for revalidation of your

Direct Data Entry access if NHIC is your HHH Medicare Administrative Contractor. You'll receive one letter listing all DDE users for validation, NHIC explains in an e-mail message to providers. "This letter will be sent to the Primary Institutional Provider address, as listed in the current Operator Control Files."

The signed form required for DDE recertification must be returned within 30 days of the date of the letter. "Users who do not re-certify will have their DDE system access terminated," NHIC warns. "After termination, DDE access will be allowed only by applying for access through the existing process." Letters are due by Sept. 6, NHIC says.