

## Health Information Compliance Alert

### Privacy Compliance: Are You Frustrated By Your Staff's Faxing Faux Pas?

#### 5 tips to keep your faxes headed in the right direction.

The privacy rule is on every practice's radar screen, but fax blunders still rank as one of the most common violations. Here's help for avoiding them.

1. **Program and maintain your frequently dialed numbers.** You'll decrease the likelihood of touching the wrong numbers if you program regularly dialed fax numbers.

But you shouldn't stop there. Rather, check in with your frequent fax recipients on a quarterly or annual basis to make sure their numbers haven't changed, recommends **Jenny O'Brien**, President, Compliance and Regulatory Affairs at Minneapolis, MN-based **Allina Hospitals & Clinics**.

Best practice: Don't just circulate your auto-dial list -- post it next to your fax machine so your staff can easily refer to it when ready to send a fax. You can help staff separate the numbers in your list by using an alternating shaded background or thick lines between numbers.

2. **Verify your new numbers.** If you need to send a fax to a place you don't normally deal with, send a test page asking for a telephone confirmation. And if you are sending highly sensitive information -- such as HIV test results -- get a talk number and call first each time to make sure you've got the right number.

3. **Follow the minimum necessary rule.** You are not required to send faxes; though doing so is probably more convenient. Cut out potential violations by only sending the most basic information.

Rule of thumb: Never fax medical records. You just never know who's going to get records at the other end and you can't make sure they're safe. By only faxing limited information, you'll keep tons of PHI out of unauthorized hands.

4. **Confirm that your faxes went to the right place.** Most machines print out a confirmation after each fax is sent. Check the number you sent information to against the number on that confirmation.

Tip: If the numbers don't match up, you can immediately mitigate the violation by explaining the mistake to the recipient and asking her to shred the information she received.

5. **Make your employees responsible for catching fax mishaps.** "We've taught our staff to police themselves," O'Brien explains. That way, someone in the office often catches a fax mistake before it becomes a violation, she notes.

Plan of attack: Encourage your staff to act on their HIPAA training. Tell them, "If you see something happening, don't just call us -- do something to stop it," O'Brien recommends.

Lesson Learned: Build your staffs' confidence in their privacy rule know-how and you'll stop leaks before they happen. If a staff member knows that his coworkers are keeping their eyes open for potential fax gaffes, he'll be less likely to make careless mistakes, O'Brien says.