

## Health Information Compliance Alert

### Privacy: Eckerd Has Key To Compliance On The Cheap

Protecting patient privacy doesn't have to be either prohibitively expensive or mind-numbingly complex. At least, that's how **Eckerd Drugs** sees it.

The pharmacy giant has come up with a practical yet inexpensive method of protecting its customers' privacy. The company has begun installing "patient privacy panels" in every one of its pharmacy counters as part of its effort to comply with HIPAA's privacy rule.

Eckerd's vice president of privacy, **John Sensabaugh**, says the panels resemble voting booth dividers and they're positioned in any place where a patient would come in contact with pharmacy staff, and mainly at the checkout area, he says.

Before the privacy and divider panels were installed, customers often would be standing shoulder to shoulder with other customers. "These dividers allow the patient to have a more confidential conversation with the pharmacy staff," Sensabaugh tells **Eli**.

The dividers are roughly six feet tall from the floor, while the top foot or so is clear Plexiglas so that the pharmacist can still see a customer that walks up to the counter while at the same time cutting down the voice volume from carrying over to the next patient.

Sensabaugh says the new patient privacy panels have been installed in all of Eckerd's stores - about 2,700 stores in 21 states. Installation began in late summer and early fall of last year and was completed just prior to the April 14 privacy rule compliance deadline. The purpose of the dividers was to become more compliant with the privacy rule, but also to provide customers and patients with a higher degree of privacy, he says.

And Sensabaugh says that while the panels represented another expense for the chain, "it was an expense well taken, because the customers definitely appreciate it."