

Health Information Compliance Alert

Privacy Tip: For PHI Peace Of Mind, Be Kind & Remind

Crafting log-on banners helps staff safeguard protected info.

Don't have the time or energy to tie strings around your workforce's fingers to remind them about the importance of protecting health information (PHI)? Well, here's a far more practical and effective way to remind your staff to be on guard when it comes to handling protected health information.

Margret Amatayakul, president of Schaumburg, ILbased **Margret A. Consulting**, was approached by a client who was looking for a way to sensitize his staff on Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) privacy and security issues.

The client asked Amatayakul to devise a series of "pithy reminders" that would scroll across computer screens whenever workforce members logged on to the system.

These log-on banners often couched as slogans or spin-offs of common phrases were intended to alternate monthly, thereby giving employees a variety of friendly reminders to safeguard patients' PHI.

"So I created a bunch of little sayings for the client to remind staff about things like not sharing your passwords or discarding your trash appropriately or keeping your voice down or verifying the caller or checking to make sure the fax went out correctly," describes Amatayakul.

As an example, Amatayakul offers us her HIPAAesque spin on the famous saying, "See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil": see no TPO, hear no A-OK, speak no PHI.

With this specific reminder, she explains, workforce members are prompted to use proper judgment to determine the appropriateness of disclosing PHI. If the proposed disclosure has nothing to do with treatment, payment or health care operations (see no TPO), and there is no authorization granted by the patient (hear no A-OK), then employees are advised not to release the protected health information (speak no PHI).

"Some people might think these reminders are kind of hokey," Amatayakul confesses. However, she's quick to add that often times it's "the hokiest stuff" that works best because it can be the easiest to remember. And it's what people will remember that's important, stresses Amatayakul.