

Health Information Compliance Alert

Reader Question: Can You Email Blank Forms To Patients With A Simple 'Okay?'

Question: I work in a pain management clinic, and we want to start sending patients their information by email. Specifically, we want to send an eight-page registration form. Currently, when we send the registration forms, we just ask for the patient's email address. Should we just ask the patients whether it's okay to send them these forms via email and document it somewhere on our files that we've gotten a verbal okay to email them?

Answer: "Yes, I think that would be a reasonable thing to do," answers **Jim Sheldon-Dean**, HIPAA expert and director of compliance services for **Lewis Creek Systems LLC** in Charlotte, VT.

In this case, you're just sending patients the forms, which are blank, "so you're really not revealing too much in that case," Sheldon-Dean notes. There's minimal risk involved.

If you just ask the patients for their permission to email and document that they've agreed to that, then you can go ahead with the emails and you have that documentation, Sheldon-Dean says. "That seems like a reasonable use."