

## Health Information Compliance Alert

### Reader Question: Is Soundproofing Required Under HIPAA?

**Question:** We're making some renovations to our office, including to the waiting room and exam rooms. I want to make sure we're compliant with federal regulations. Do we need to pull out the drywall and make other structural changes for soundproofing in order to remain compliant with the HIPAA?

Codify Subscriber

**Answer:** No, HIPAA does not require making these kinds of structural changes, according to the **Department of Health and Human Services Office for Civil Rights** (OCR).

"Covered entities must have in place appropriate administrative, technical, and physical safeguards to protect the privacy of protected health information. This standard requires that covered entities make reasonable efforts to prevent uses and disclosures not permitted by the Rule," the OCR says. However, structural changes like soundproofing do not apply. The HIPAA Privacy Rule also does not require private rooms, the encryption of wireless or other emergency medical radio communications that are susceptible to interception by scanners, or the encryption of telephone systems.

If you already have private examination rooms, it certainly makes sense to keep them private; hospitals or other larger clinics may be able to offer a modicum of privacy while delivering care through use of visual barriers instead of walls and doors.

However, keep in mind that spaces where staff and patients interact and exchange information - particularly protected health information (PHI) - should be fitted with some means of ensuring at least a bit of privacy.

"In an area where multiple patient-staff communications routinely occur, use of cubicles, dividers, shields, curtains, or similar barriers may constitute a reasonable safeguard. For example, a large clinic intake area may reasonably use cubicles or shield-type dividers, rather than separate rooms, or providers could add curtains or screens to areas where discussions often occur between doctors and patients or among professionals treating the patient," the OCR says.