

Health Information Compliance Alert

READER QUESTIONS: LET PATIENTS REQUEST STAFF FOLLOW UPS

Question: Many of our critical care staff become attached to the patients they treat and want to follow up on the patients after they are no longer in critical condition. Can we allow staff members to check in with their patients' other care providers or is this a privacy violation?

Idaho subscriber

Answer: "You can allow it, but you have to set up some parameters," advises **William Hubbartt**, a privacy and security expert with Hubbartt & Associates in St. Charles, IL.

You must include your follow-up practices in your NPP so that patients are aware of how you will operate after they leave your care. For example, many health care providers have an established practice of patient follow-up contact within 24 to 48 hours of providing a significant service, such as a major surgery, Hubbartt explains.

Caveat: You should not allow staff members to contact patients' care providers after they leave your care if that contact is solely for personal reasons, Hubbartt stresses. If your staffer and a patient develop a friendship, the patient must authorize your employee to obtain any further information.

The Bottom Line: Your patients must make the ultimate decision about post-treatment contact, or you will be in violation of the privacy rule.