

## Health Information Compliance Alert

### READER QUESTIONS: OFFICE GIFTS GET GREEN LIGHT

**Question:** Do doctor's offices need to obtain authorization before distributing any kind of promotional gift (of nominal value) to patients?

Iowa Subscriber

**Answer:** No. There is an exception in the HIPAA Privacy Rule that says covered entities are allowed to distribute such gifts without prior authorization. These distributions may be permitted even if a covered entity offers the promotional gift in order to encourage patients to purchase the services or products being promoted, states the HHS on its Web page.

The authorization usually covers items or services from a third party that may or may not be health-related and items or services produced by the covered entity that are not health-related. Some of the items under the authorization exception are logoed pens, notepads, cups or, in the case of dentistry, toothbrushes, floss, and toothpaste.