

Health Information Compliance Alert

Reader Questions: Play It Safe With Voice Mail Messages

Question: Can we leave phone messages on a patient's answering machine?

Answer: Yes, but with some caveats, since when it comes to answering voice mail, "less is definitely more," advises **Melissa Cornwell**, HIPAA coordinator for **Floyd Regional Medical Center** in Rome, Ga.

Cornwell advises practices not to leave messages with medical information and notes that making any mention of radiology or biopsies or pap smears is over the line. In fact, she says, "don't leave more of a message than to say, 'Hi, this is so-and-so from doctor so-and-so's office. Please call me at such-and-such a number.'"

The best way to cover your bases is to take a preemptive approach, Cornwell urges. When the patient comes in for his first appointment, have him fill out a form that asks him to specify how you may leave phone messages whether on voice mail or with a designated relative.