

Pain Management Coding Alert

Reader Question: Repel PHI Hackers With Frequent Updates

Question: In the past year, we have had to deal with several Health Insurance Portability & Accountability Act (HIPAA) violations. The most common violations involved hackers gaining entrance into our patient portal, which resulted in compromised personal health information (PHI). How can we combat hackers?

Maryland Subscriber

Answer: Hacking is already a major headache for many medical practices, and it's looking to get worse. Some studies have suggested that hacking is the cause of nearly a quarter of all HIPAA breaches.

According to Medical Mutual Liability Insurance of Maryland (MMLIM), these hacks are often pretty basic. "Hackers are often looking for the path of least resistance. Some popular methods are exploiting a user profile with a weak password, using malware, or a software exploit," MMLIM reports.

While this is not a cure-all to stop HIPAA hackers, you could enact these steps to try and stymie hackers, according to MMLIM:

- **Update passwords frequently:** "Cracking weak passwords is one of the easiest ways to hack a system. ... Just make sure that your master password is very difficult, and change that regularly," MMLIM reports.
- **Use software firewalls:** A hardware firewall appliance is also a good way to restrict traffic on your network, according to MMLIM.
- **Install malware-scanning software:** When you're shopping around, remember that the best malware-scanning programs regularly update to look for viruses, Trojan horses and other malware that could affect PHI security.
- **Update software regularly:** Every month or so, you should check for updates on all your software programs. "This will go a long way to patching vulnerabilities on your devices," according to MMLIM.