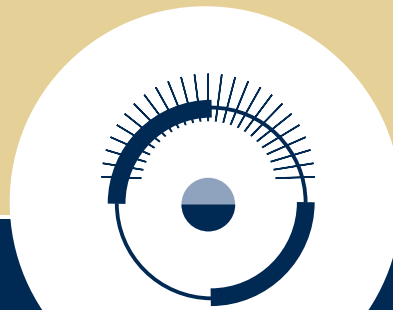


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NOTICE OF PRIVACY PRACTICES

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NOTICE OF PRIVACY PRACTICES - Concerning your medical information

What you need to know about the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)

While we have always gone to great lengths to ensure the privacy of your personal health information, the Federal Government has new regulations. These regulations will help standardize privacy and security requirements across the country and across all different types of healthcare organizations.

Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA)

Is a Federal program that requires that all medical records and other individually identifiable health information used or disclosed by us in any form, whether electronically, on paper, or orally are kept properly confidential. This Act gives you, the patient, significant new rights to understand and control how your healthy information is used. "HIPAA" provides penalties for covered entities that misuse personal health information.

As required by HIPAA, we have prepared this informational brochure to explain how we are required to maintain the privacy of your health information and how may use or disclose it.

New Regulations Passed

The regulations are part of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, or HIPAA for short. HIPAA does three primary things.

1. It helps standardize and simplify the way healthcare organizations exchange electronic health care data.
2. It provides consumers with additional protections for getting and maintaining health insurance coverage; although, it does not guarantee coverage.
3. It creates new security rules to ensure the safety and privacy of individual health information and medical records.

HIPAA Ensures the Privacy and Security of Individual Health Information

Currently, individual state laws govern use and disclosure of this information, creating many inconsistencies and gaps in the way your health information is protected. HIPAA sets minimum security and privacy standards for healthcare organizations to follow. If a state has more stringent privacy and security laws, then those would be followed instead. In addition, HIPAA sets heavy penalties for violations of these standards and the misuse of personal health information.

Defining Individual Health Information

Every time you go to see a doctor, are admitted to a hospital, fill a prescription, or send a claim to an insurance company, a record is made of your confidential health information. This information is referred to as individually identifiable health information and is the type of information regulated by HIPAA. It can be in any format (electric, paper, or oral).

Healthcare organizations that collect and manage this type of information and are therefore covered by these regulations including physicians, physical therapists, mental health professionals, dentists, chiropractors, optometrists, podiatrists and others; hospitals, health plans; employers; healthcare clearinghouses such as claims processors; and other healthcare organizations who conduct administrative and financial transactions.

Added Control Over Health Information

Under HIPAA, you have new rights to understand and control how your health information is used:

Right to education: Healthcare providers and health plans are required to provide you with a clear written explanation of how they intend to use and disclose your information.

Right to access medical records: You have the right to see and get copies of your medical records, request changes, and receive a history of non-routine disclosures of your personal health information.

Right to consent: Healthcare providers are required to obtain prior consent before sharing personal health information for purposes other than treatment, payment and healthcare operation.

Right to recourse: You have the right to file a formal complaint if you believe that violations of the regulations were made.

In general, HIPAA tries to find a balance between protecting your privacy and allowing the appropriate flow of information between healthcare providers that is necessary for you to access care and receive quality healthcare services.

We may use and disclose your medical records only for each of the following purposes: treatment, payment, and health care operations.

Treatment means providing, coordinating, or managing health care and related services by one or more health care providers. An example of this would include a physical examination.

Payment means such activities as obtaining reimbursement of services, confirming coverage, billing or collection activities, and utilization review. An example of this would be sending a bill for your visit to your insurance company for payment.

Healthcare operations means the business aspects of running our practice, such as conducting quality assessment, improvement activities, and patient service. An example would be an internal quality assessment review.

For a copy of our PRIVACY PRACTICES, please contact our privacy officer, Nena Van Brocklin, at 788-6070.

For more information about HIPAA or to file a complaint:

US Dept. of Health & Human Services
Office of Civil Rights
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201
(202) 619-0257

TOLL FREE: 1-877-696-6775