

## HIPAA: ARE WE DONE YET?

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It's Christmas time, and again we get to work on HIPAA!

The HIPAA security deadline, April 20, 2005, is rapidly approaching with only five months to go for all "covered entities" except small health plans. Small health plans have until April 2006. As with all HIPAA regulations, there are both civil and criminal penalties for failure to comply.

The security deadline requires that covered entities have three basic safeguards in place prior to April 2005. The first safeguard is administrative. Administrative safeguards include designating your security official, creating policies and procedures for all electronic protected health information, performing a risk analysis, etc. All covered entities must address data integrity and confidentiality. The second requirement is physical security. This includes the use of locks, keys and passwords, among other things, for computers, media and electronic information systems. The final category for HIPAA security is technical safeguards. Technical safeguards require covered entities to protect, monitor and control information access. The entity must implement systems that will identify data access activities in an effort to prevent unauthorized access to data submitted over integrated networks. The good news about HIPAA security is that the regulations allow flexibility in determining how to comply with each standard. This flexibility allows each entity to implement a process that works for their individual work environment. Thus, many of us are under the

false impression that we have finally conquered HIPAA. We keep telling ourselves that we are compliant, have done the training, have HIPAA compliance plans and are absolutely through with, "that HIPAA thing." The fact remains that most entities have a lot of work to do. According to a recent study done by the American Health Information Management Association, only about 23% of the respondents surveyed said that they felt they were completely compliant with HIPAA Security.

Once an entity has implemented the security rule, it is important to remember that HIPAA is not "done." HIPAA is not a task, an event, nor a target date; rather it is an ongoing process that will continue to require attention. HIPAA requires continued re-evaluation, periodic audits, policy implementation and updating with the advances in technology to support the evolving environment of the healthcare industry.

Remember, it is a process, so beginning is the first step: Understand the security regulations, organize your work effort, identify your resources, and plan the project.

If you need any additional information regarding HIPAA or other healthcare issues, please contact Lori-Ann Rickard of Rickard & Associates, P.C. at (586) 498-0600.