HIPAA AT THE CED

**HIPAA = the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act**

HIPAA is a federal law which requires all organizations to protect their patients’ health information. This health information is officially called “Protected Health Information” (PHI.) Although the law was first written for health care organizations, it applies to all organizations that may have access to PHI for any reason.

**Protected Health Information** **(PHI)**:

Any past, present, or future information about a health condition a patient might have, any health services a patient might receive, and any record of payment a patient makes or that is made on his/her behalf.

**At the CED, PHI may be found in**:

* **Computers**
* **Phone messages**, **Faxes, Mail**
* **Paper Files**
* **Email**

**How to secure PHI:**

* + Store PHI on the “H” drive of your computer, not on the “C” drive. Store PHI on USB flash drives that have password protection. Store USBs in a secure place when not in use.
  + Protect office phones and cell phones with passwords. Delete phone messages quickly or transfer to paper.
  + Store faxes, mail, paper files and any other paper containing PHI in locked cabinets.
* Send PHI only via secure email. To do this, HSC email users can put the word ”secure” in brackets somewhere in the subject line, like this: [secure]

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**IN ADDITION:**

* Put sensitive documents out of sight and lock your computer screen whenever you take a break.
* Shred all discarded paper documents, phone messages and scraps of paper that contain PHI.

You do not have to use HIPAA safeguards if sharing de-identified information. See the CED document entitled, “Protected Health Information.” It lists 18 identifiers that must be removed to de-identify documents. If you are sharing a digital file with de-identified information, make sure the digital file name is also de-identified.

**WHAT’S OKAY TO DO UNDER HIPAA?**

* *It’s okay to* discuss protected health information with specific individuals, caregivers, providers, and management teams when the patient or consumer has given written permission to allow this.
* *It’s okay* todiscuss a consumer’s needs with other providers who may potentially be involved in the case. Avoid using the consumer’s name in these situations.
* *It’s okay* for medical providers to refer patients to other health care providers without first informing the patients. However, the CED emphasizes person-centered services. Therefore, our staff does not make referrals to other providers without first discussing those referrals with patients and consumers.
* *It’s okay* topreserve privacy and patient confidentiality to a reasonable extent only. Complete privacy and confidentiality may not be possible in all situations. The government asks us to make a reasonable effort to uphold HIPAA.