

Book: Managing HIPAA Compliance: Standards for Electronic Transmission, Privacy, and Security of Health Information

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Publisher: Health Administration Press, 2001, Chicago, IL

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HIPAA has become the major preoccupation for health care providers, systems, and insurers over the past several years. The abundance of legislation, regulations, and opinions published have complicated the potential to understand HIPAA and its' implications. Health care administrators in particular must be able to comprehend the nuances of HIPAA, and convert theory to practical application. The alternative could be financially detrimental and operationally challenging to their organizations.

This book guides the administrator through the process of HIPAA compliance by breaking it into components. Dealing effectively with the three major parts of HIPAA; electronic transactions and code sets, privacy, and security, the book is detailed yet deceptively easy to read. The format of the book features chapter titles and topics that are positioned for quick reference. This information is easily accessible, and structured for practical use. Withrow takes a logical, general and specific approach in presenting his compliance models. Technical information and legislative citations are well documented with endnotes to allow for further research of policy, and federal regulations. Concise tables and exhibits, with lucid explanations of the complex regulations and legal ramifications attest to the author's background as a CPA and attorney.

Several characteristics of the book are particularly valuable for the busy health care executive. First, the author addresses the intent of HIPAA, explores the potential results of noncompliance, and discusses some alternatives that could make HIPAA ineffective or obsolete. For example, Withrow submits that the technological gains of the Internet and direct connectivity for data transmission could eliminate the need for middlemen and clearinghouses featured so prominently in traditional Electronic Data Interchange (EDI). He considers those EDI features outdated, built upon an "early 1990's world in which electronic health information was stored in large, centralized payer and provider legacy systems." He suggests that the "current potential is for providers to store huge fields of data in a common cyberspace accessible with a telephone, cable, or wireless connection." Secondly, Withrow outlines the Action Steps that administrators should address in preparing for HIPAA compliance. These form a clear map for those seeking direction. As a value-added feature, Withrow injects notes that reflect his own astute observations, regarding the impact and potential for HIPAA. In this vein, he gives some suggestions as to how small provider organizations might satisfy HIPAA requirements by applying less costly, yet effective measures.

For health policy analysts and small practice administrators alike, this book is a worthy read. The few hours invested into reading it will both answer questions and ignite interest in further study. I recommend it for all decision-makers that are faced with the uncertain task of preparing for HIPAA.

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