HIPAA FACTS

HIPAA standards will require major changes in how your organization handles all facets of information management. Understanding the HIPAA regulations will be a lot easier if you implement four important steps now:

1. Get to know the basic components of HIPAA rules and regulations; the more you know, the less exposure and cost you will have. There are 3 major components of HIPAA:
   a. Privacy
   b. Transactions Code Sets
   c. Security
      i. Administrative Safeguards
      ii. Physical Safeguards
      iii. Technical Safeguards

It is important to have documentation and have written policies. Your practice will have to carefully consider how you are going to handle and protect PHI; your written policies and procedures will have to be tailored to your practice and your employees.

Training is one of the key factors of HIPAA; you need to have training for all members of your organization. Once again, reasonable is the key here. You, as an entity, can choose and determine the most effective means of communication for your workforce.

Develop a means for an individual to lodge complaints about your organization, and have a good record keeping policy.

EFFECTIVE HIPAA PROGRAM

HIPAA requirements, in many respects, represent best practices for your protected information (PHI) management. Your organization needs to take steps to reexamine most of your operation. The following points should be your focal points for an effective compliance plan:

✓ Limit the release of PHI
✓ Inform your patients of how their health information is being used.
✓ Give an individual access to his or her own records and the right to request amendments or make corrections.

✓ Restrict the amount of information used and disclosed to the "Minimum Necessary"
✓ Create penalties for violations

STEPS TO HIPAA COMPLIANCE

1) It is important that HIPAA awareness be established with your executive level. Sanctioning of the efforts must also be incorporated. Your HIPAA awareness can be established in a variety of ways:

   a) Bringing in industry specialists

   b) Attending conferences

   c) Reviewing the federal rules and reading credible literature.

These above steps will also help identify the main issues that your entity may have to address and create a do-able initial Project Plan and tasks to help establish compliance for your entity.

2) Conduct a HIPAA Assessment to establish which areas, programs and functions are impacted. This may require your staff to interact with your business partners. This step will also identify Business Associates and trading Partners with whom you will need to interact.

3) A Project Plan with time lines is required for your organization to have an effective and "cost controlled" methodology for achieving compliance. Designate staff for each task and establish dates for task completion. This will be your tool for monitoring progress and addressing issues as your HIPAA project proceeds. The Plan also needs to have a detailed resource and cost estimate for the project.

4) Implementation should be your final step. It involves making the changes to processes and procedures, revising user instructions, training staff, testing all changes, testing with your business partners, having a coordinated implementation process, and monitoring the new processes.

Critical throughout the process is top management involvement, monitoring progress toward goals, and communication and coordination with your business partners. With HIPAA being a series of Federal Rules, your organization will have to revisit at periodic points, and several of the above steps may need to be repeated as the rules change.