



You and your
medical record/4

Securing the
space/5

Travel
tips/7

yale health care

NEWS FROM THE YALE HEALTH PLAN

VOL. VI NO. 2

MARCH–APRIL 2003

What is hipaa and why should I care?

In this age of instant information, concerns about the privacy and integrity of personal data—whether financial, medical, or any other—are now a common part of public policy discourse. HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) is a measure passed initially by Congress in 1996 to require the adoption by medical facilities of security and privacy standards to protect personal health information. The legislation allowed for a six-year public debate about how to implement HIPAA's provisions, an implementation that is taking place this spring. While the legislation is, as you can imagine, lengthy and complex, a summary of its main features includes the following:

- clear limitations on and parameters for the use and release of individually identifiable health information;
- the right of patients to obtain access and make amendments to their medical records;

continued on page 2

Securing the data



For generations, creating “security” in a facility involved the physical: fireproof file cabinets, reinforced doors, tamper-proof window locks, alarm systems and surveillance cameras. Locks, alarms and file cabinets are by no means obsolete but, in this era of computer-based communication and record-keeping, many of the locks and keys we rely on are now electronic.

As part of HIPAA the federal Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has proposed measures to be implemented this April assuring that personal health information is safe and not subject to tampering. HIPAA also mandates taking all possible measures to protect health information

from accidental or intentional access by unauthorized persons. Although these security rules are not yet final as of this writing, YUHS has been actively implementing “best practice” measures to secure its computer systems and “protected health information” (PHI) — the data that needs “protecting” under HIPAA regulations.

The securing (technical and systemic protection) and safeguarding (putting in place policies and work procedures) of PHI at YUHS has involved a three-step process: assessment of vulnerability; development of corrective procedures; implementation of industry standard security technology. Over the past 18 months, our entire staff has been educated on the physical security of our computer systems, the appropriate use of technology, and work habits that will best protect our members’ health data.

One example of the changes being made involves the use of e-mail. While e-mail has been an acceptable method of patient–clinician contact, regular e-mail is not expected to meet the security standards set forth in HIPAA. Since YUHS had already implemented Yale Health Online, our secure web-based

continued on page 2

Speaking HIPAA

See page 4 for definitions of some of the terms you’ll be hearing as HIPAA is implemented in this and other health-care facilities.

SECURING THE DATA

continued from page 1

communication system, a standardized reply to patient e-mails now directs members to this method of contacting their clinicians.

Dear patient:

I have received your e-mail message. Unfortunately, since this form of communication is not considered secure, I am unable to respond by e-mail. I will contact you by telephone regarding your message. However, Yale University Health Services does provide a means of secure messaging via our website, Yale Health Online. This web-based messaging system allows secure communication with our office for administrative functions like scheduling appointments, as well as non-urgent messages to our clinicians. For more information, please visit the web site, at: www.yale-healthonline.yale.edu, and click on "Guest Visit." If you are interested in signing up, click on "first time registration." Please call our office if you need more information.

Another example of ensuring security involves limiting access to the computer room to those personnel responsible for maintaining the systems. Doing this involved both physically controlling access with a new lock system, as well as requiring clinical personnel to pick up reports from basement mailboxes rather than the computer area. This kind of teamwork at YUHS has made our response to the HIPAA initiative a proud accomplishment rather than a government imposed hardship. While changing human behavior is often more difficult than deploying technology, YUHS personnel have embraced the responsibility of HIPAA's mandates for security.

Some other measures we have taken:

- Installation of firewall appliances on YUHS networks.
- Providing every desktop computer at YUHS with its own logon profile and password to assure authentication.
- Use of encryption for any PHI transmitted to business partners outside of YUHS.

Important telephone numbers

Urgent Care	432-0123
<i>Open 24 hrs/day, seven days per week</i>	
Toll Free	1-877-YHP-CARE
Information	432-0246
Pharmacy	432-0033
<i>Hours of operation</i>	
Monday–Wednesday, Friday	7:30 AM–6:30 PM
Thursday	8:30 AM–6:30 PM
Saturday	8:30 AM–3:30 PM
Patient Representative	432-0109
Medicare/Retiree Coordinator	432-8134
Outpatient Referrals	432-7397
Claims	432-0250
Inpatient Care Facility	432-0001

in touch



- The coding, development and testing of standard electronic data interchange (EDI) transaction sets as mandated under the security rule for standardization and portability of PHI. This relates to transmitting materials such as claims, referrals, eligibility notices, between the YHP and other providers of service (for instance, Yale New Haven Hospital or Medicare) in a standard data format, as part of the "administrative simplification" segment of HIPAA.
- Use of industry standard encryption on Yale Health Online, our secure, web-based clinical communications system.
- Installation of computer screen savers and privacy screens to keep sensitive patient data from being visible in public areas.
- Development and deployment of strict procedures for logging off active computer sessions to prevent unauthorized use.
- Planning, development, deployment and testing of a business contingency plan / disaster recovery plan to ensure that clinicians and patients will have access to PHI in the event of an emergency. This also includes the development of a manual back-up plan that can be adopted in the event of computer failure.
- Training personnel on security measures and procedures and clarifying their roles in protecting PHI.

WHAT IS HIPAA

continued from page 1

- restriction on most disclosures of health information to the minimum needed for the intended purpose;
- establishment of safeguards when records are disclosed for certain public responsibilities, such as public health and law enforcement.

More than just another government acronym, HIPAA will become an essential part of the way your medical records and information are handled. In this issue you will learn more about the specifics of this legislation and how it effects you.



from the desk of

PAUL GENECIN

DIRECTOR, YALE UNIVERSITY HEALTH SERVICES

In the 4th Century, B.C.E., Hippocrates wrote: *All that may come to my knowledge in the exercise of my profession or in daily commerce with men, which ought not to be spread abroad, I will keep secret and will never reveal.* Since antiquity, physicians have sworn the Hippocratic Oath, including this promise to uphold the right to confidentiality.

Confidentiality and privacy are related but not synonymous. Privacy is an individual's right to keep certain matters secret. Clinical confidentiality is the responsibility of health care workers to safeguard patients' personal information. If a clinician cannot elicit intimate symptoms and concerns in confidence, the ability to provide appropriate treatment is compromised.

This issue of *yale health care* contains information about the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA), comprehensive legislation which both establishes federal medical privacy requirements and allows for states to institute more stringent laws if they so choose. HIPAA and the six-year public debate about details of its implementation have opened up the subject of clinical confidentiality for widespread discussion. Around the country, health care facilities, including Yale Health Plan, have used this time to examine their own practices concerning patient privacy.

Since its inception in 1971, Yale Health Plan has recognized the challenges as well as the extreme importance of safeguarding patient privacy. As a University-owned health plan, we would be unable to deliver care to Yale's students, faculty and staff if they were concerned about whether professors, supervisors, classmates or colleagues had access to their private health records. We have also celebrated the virtues of our unified medical record, not just because it is comprehensive, but also because it further protects private information by keeping it in one place rather than dispersed among many offices.

With the advent of the computer era, we have also been conscious of the importance of protecting electronic information. We foresaw that computers could transfer private information with remarkable efficiency—and potentially jeopardize confidentiality by transmitting personal data to inappropriate recipients. Starting in the 1970s, each information system enhancement at YHP has featured safeguards to minimize the risk of breaches of privacy. This is especially crucial as we move into the era of the electronic medical record (EMR). We will have systems in place that limit access to the EMR to treating clinicians and specified support staff and that monitor traffic to prevent inappropriate access to medical information.

Perhaps most importantly, I want to stress YHP's "culture of confidentiality." When I started here in 1989, I was immediately impressed with this culture, which is equally robust today. Stated simply, YHP clinicians and staff do not casually talk about patients. We do not discuss diagnoses or results or admissions to the hospital or Inpatient Care Facility (ICF). I have observed colleagues shutting down discussions so that a breach of privacy does not take place. People frequently assume that I, as the director, know when they are hospitalized, admitted to the ICF or undergoing treatment. Without any clinical reason to know, I do not receive private medical information.

Implementation of HIPAA compliance is a challenge across the University and across the country. However, it is not the HIPAA rules that give me confidence that my family and I can obtain health care at Yale Health Plan without concern about our privacy. Rather, it is my ongoing confidence in a well-established commitment to confidentiality evident among the clinicians and staff at YHP.

You and your medical record

TERMS RELATED TO INFORMATION SECURITY

Security Technical solutions which provide the ability to control access and protect information from accidental or intentional disclosure.

Safeguarding Adjusting work habits and procedures to protect patient's health information

Privacy Defines who is authorized to have access to information and details the rights of individuals to keep information about themselves private.

User authentication The process of identifying an individual usually based on a user name and password.

Data encryption The transformation of ordinary text or data into a random and unintelligible string or sequence of characters.

Contingency plan A plan to ensure the integrity, confidentiality and availability of a facility's health information during and after an emergency.

Privacy screen Devices on computer screens that block or blur any protected health information from being viewed in publicly located areas such as reception areas or hallways.

Firewall Hardware on a computer network that guards against unauthorized access from outside computers.

What is a medical record?

Our medical record is a comprehensive and confidential document detailing medical history, diagnosis, treatment and prognosis. Although your medical record is owned by YUHS, you have the right to request access to or a copy of this information, the right to request an amendment, and the right to obtain a list of disclosures we have made of your health information.

Requesting a copy or a review of your medical record

In most cases, you have the right to look at or get a copy of medical information that we use to make decisions about your care. Your request for this information must be in writing on a form called an [authorization for use or disclosure of protected health information](#) which is available from the Medical Records Department 203-432-7785, from the external web and from the patient representative. Please be aware that YUHS can make copies only of information that was created and maintained by us. A copy of your request will be filed in your medical record.

Requesting changes to the information in your record

If you believe that information in your record is incorrect or incomplete, you may want to request changes to your record. Your request for this information must be in writing on a form called [request for amendment of the record](#). Your request will be reviewed by your treating clinician and the need for correction assessed. The response to your request will be documented on this form and made part of the original medical record.

Please be aware that our decision about whether to or not to amend the record will be included any time you ask us to send your records out, such as to another health care provider or insurer. Also, if you previously authorized disclosure of any of your medical information to a third party, we are required by law to send a copy of the decision about changes in your record to that person or organization.

We may deny your request if the information was not created by us; if it is not part of the medical information maintained by us; or if we determine that your record is accurate.

Although your medical record is owned by yuhs, you as a member have the right to request access to or a copy of this information.

Requesting a list of disclosures

You have the right to ask us to provide you with a list of persons or organizations that had access to your health information by using a [request for accounting of disclosures for health information](#) form. This list will not include any disclosures made pertaining to your treatment, payment, health care operations or where you have given specific authorization to disclose your health information. YUHS will also provide you with a list of disclosures upon your request. A copy of your request and our response will be made a part of the original record.

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Securing the space

Preventing the unintended release of protected health information (PHI) as mandated by HIPAA has involved a re-examination of the physical environment at YUHS. While privacy and security have always been central to our operations, responding to HIPAA guidelines has allowed us to make additional improvements to our facility and procedures. Recent enhancements have included the following.

- All clinics have a locked cabinet to allow for the overnight storage of medical records which clinicians may still be using. These cabinets are centrally located and accessible only to authorized staff who may need the information should an emergency arise before the clinic reopens.
- We have provided secure areas to leave non-charted information that needs to be exchanged between departments at times other than regular clinic hours.
- A chart tracking system being implemented by the Medical Records and Information Service departments will allow clinicians and other staff to determine the exact location of any charts that have been removed from the Medical Records area for clinical use.
- Computers located in public spaces have been fitted with privacy screens, which allow information to be viewed only by someone standing directly in front of the screen.
- Computers that are located in public areas and that have patient information on them have been set to lock out after very short times so that only authorized personnel can log back in.
- New technology has allowed us to secure some of our publicly located fax machines, printers and copiers so that information is printed out only by request and with a secure log in. Some require codes in order to be able to print out information in public areas.
- Our data center has been secured and is accessible only to authorized personnel from the ISS (Information System Services) Department.
- Our medical records area is off limits to all but authorized staff and an area separate from the storage of records has been established to accommodate visitors to the department.
- The large volume of paper generated in a health care facility such as ours requires proper disposal. We have contracted with a HIPAA-compliant record destruction company which provides locked containers throughout the building to hold material until their regularly scheduled pick up. At the time of pick up they cross shred the materials on our grounds and then remove it for recycling.
- All desks in unlocked areas will be cleared at the end of the day and any medical information locked away overnight.

Staff training is a major component of implementing hipaa. All University staff members who handle patient health information—including not only yuhs staff, but those from the Schools of Nursing and Medicine, the Benefits Office and others—have attended training sessions and used on-line materials in order to: understand how the legislation works; become familiar with terminology; learn strategies for eliminating existing problems and handling any future violations; and learn where to get additional assistance. Any new employees who handle patient health information will also be required to participate in hipaa training programs to ensure the highest level of confidentiality for the medical information of everyone in the University community.

The physical configuration of reception and waiting areas has presented some challenges as we work to balance the protection of verbally transmitted information with your comfort and access to our staff. To achieve that balance we have rearranged furnishings, put up partitions, and increased staff awareness about this aspect of information security. We will continue to upgrade the facility and improve our processes to insure the highest level of protection for your medical information.



As part of our compliance with HIPAA, we will soon be sending all our members a document called the **YUHS Notice of Privacy Practices**. It contains information about our policies regarding the confidentiality of our members' medical records. Please watch for this notice and make sure to review it, sign it, and return the attached acknowledgment form; parents or guardians are asked to sign for minor children.

information

INFORMATION

FROM THE PHARMACY

Over the next few months, you will see some major improvements in Pharmacy communication and medication monitoring systems, many made in response to member suggestion. These will include:

- An improved Pharmacy web page: www.yale.edu/uhs/departments/pharmacy/index.html, with an updated look and more information.
- More printed information available in our waiting area.

yale health care

published by Yale Health Plan

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- Direct mailings to groups of members who are affected by specific medication-related issues.



What will these communications initiatives mean for you?

- We will be keeping you informed about changes to our formulary—the group of drugs that we stock—as well as about changes to systems that may affect the way that you can obtain certain medications. In past issues of this newsletter, we have outlined our formulary selection process, the use of “preferred medications” and medication management programs as ways of providing the best medications that are also the most cost-effective. In the near future, you will be able to view formulary reference guides on our web page so that you will know what preferred drugs are available.
- We will also use our web page and other communication tools to provide information such as the availability of new generics and changes in product packaging and appearance (i.e. the pill that used to be blue and round is now square and yellow). You will also be able to obtain clinical information such as tips on medication use and how to report a drug reaction.
- We will continue to be proactive in monitoring medication use to ensure that our members are taking their medications correctly and are complying with dosing recommendations and clinical guidelines.

NEW LABORATORY HOURS

The YUHS Laboratory is now open from 8:00–4:45, Monday through Friday.



healthy

GETTING THERE—SAFELY

Hang up and drive

Using cell phones while driving increases the risk of collision. Turn the phone off before starting the car. Let callers leave a voicemail. If you have passengers, let someone else answer the phone and take a message or, if you're expecting an important call, let someone else drive.

Buckle up and live

Every 15 seconds, someone is injured in a traffic accident and someone is killed in a crash every 13 minutes. However, seat belts save over 11,000 lives each year. If you're not buckled up, you could be thrown through a window, sent skidding along the pavement or be crushed under your own or another vehicle. To use your seat belts most effectively:

- Adjust the lap belt to fit low and tight across your hips/pelvis, not your stomach area.
- Place the shoulder belt snug across your chest, away from your neck.
- Never place the shoulder belt behind your back or under your arm.

Wearing a seat belt isn't just a good idea, it's the law. Many states are strictly enforcing their seat belt laws. Seat belt tickets can mean hefty fines and, in some places, points on your license.



ideas

Driving and drinking don't mix

Despite increased public awareness that alcohol and driving are a deadly combination, 16,652 adults and children were killed on U.S. roads in 2001 as a result of drunk driving. In addition, over 500,000 people were injured.

There's nothing complicated about the message: Don't drink and drive. Period. If you've been drinking and need to travel, assign a designated driver, call a cab or take public transportation. Also:

- You can't "sober up" by drinking coffee or taking a walk around the block. Only the passage of time, allowing alcohol to leave the system, creates sobriety.
- Have something to eat before you start drinking. While eating won't necessarily prevent you from getting drunk, food spreads the alcohol absorption over a longer period of time.
- Don't be offended if someone suggests that you've had too much to allow you to drive safely. They are probably right. This is not about saving face; it's about saving lives.
- If you aren't sure whether you're impaired, you probably are. Alcohol impairs even basic judgment. Better to be cautious than to have regrets later — or not to have a later at all.

Did you know?

- The number one cause of risk while traveling is accidents—this includes pedestrian and motor vehicle accidents caused by driver error, poor road visibility, poor road maintenance and poor signage.
- Don't swim alone if the locals aren't swimming: the number two accident risk for travelers is drowning.
- Pregnant women are immuno-compromised and are at risk when traveling. If you are pregnant and planning to travel outside the U.S., check with your clinician.

TIPS FOR INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL

Know basic information about the places you are visiting

- What are the demographics?
- What are the gender or age issues in the country? For instance: who can properly speak to whom; what are the customs regarding eye contact, personal space, social touching (i.e. handshakes, hugs, etc).
- Where and how long will you be in each country;?
- Will you be traveling in rural or urban areas and what kinds of accommodations can you expect?
- What is the political situation in the country and surrounding areas?
- Will you need to register with the embassy?

Arrange for immunizations

- Immunizations are prescriptions and must be ordered by a clinician.
- You need to bring your up-to-date immunization history with you when you travel.
- Minimal immunizations are: tetanus (needed every ten years); hepatitis A and B (taken in a series over a few months); influenza and polio.
- Certain locales require further immunizations such as meningitis, Japanese encephalitis and yellow fever.

Plan ahead with medications and prescriptions

- Carry with you a list of your drug and food allergies.
- Bring your eyeglass and contact prescriptions with you.

- Take all medications (prescribed and over the counter) in the original labeled bottles.
- Some medications (like antacids) will make you more prone to other diseases. Before you leave, check with your clinician and a pharmacist about this and discuss your options.
- Take more than enough prescribed medications with you; the YUHS pharmacy cannot mail refills.

Be aware of your own personal health and psychological issues

- How are you affected by changes in time, diet and routine?
- Do you require a specialized diet? If so, have you made the necessary arrangements?
- Do you know basic first aid?
- Do you have any health conditions which may be precipitated or aggravated by prolonged travel?
- If you are traveling at high altitudes, do you know how you will react? If not, talk to your clinician about this before you leave.
- If you are planning a long trip away from friends and family, are you prepared for the separation?
- Be aware of each nation's laws about use of illicit substances.

Also

- Make sure to leave a detailed itinerary with at least three people who know how to contact each other.
- To contact YHP when you are outside of the US: A list of out of country toll free numbers is available at Member Services or on our website.
- Consider purchasing an international cell phone.



Let us know

As the focus on confidentiality intensifies over the coming months, Yale University Health Services (YUHS), like other healthcare organizations, will be making it easier for you to alert us to your patient confidentiality concerns. Below is information about how to do so.

Ask to speak with the department manager.

If you are visiting a clinical or administrative area and experience a situation that creates concern about your confidentiality, speak to the department manager and ask for follow-up as appropriate. You may also request written response to your concerns.

Complete a patient comment card.

These cards are available in every YUHS department as well as on line at the YUHS website (www.yale.edu/uhs). All cards received at YUHS are sent directly to our patient representative, who reviews the information, makes a determination about follow-up, and tracks the response for all YUHS departments. The patient representative forwards copies of all comment cards to the appropriate department managers and, in clinical departments, to the department chiefs. Chiefs and managers will follow up with patients about their comments to ensure that patients are satisfied with the handling of the situation.

Additionally, Paul Genecin, M.D., director of the YUHS and Chris Kielt, the deputy director of operations and the deputy privacy officer for YUHS, also review all comment cards as well as written responses to patient concerns. If a comment card involves an issue related to confidentiality or privacy, several steps will be initiated:

- The YUHS deputy privacy officer will investigate the concern.
- The Yale University privacy officer, will be informed of the patient concern, the nature and results of the investigation, and any follow-up or changes to procedures resulting from the review.
- Depending on the nature of the concern and the results of the review, the University privacy officer may recommend changes to policies and procedures required to ensure patient privacy.

Patients may also choose to contact the Department of Health and Human Services themselves. The patient representative can provide the address.

It's not too early to be thinking about your child's camp, school and sports physical exams. Please call the Pediatrics Department at 203-432-0206 to schedule an appointment.



WORK TOGETHER WALK TOGETHER

The 16th annual spring walking program co-sponsored by the YUHS Office of Health Promotion and Education and the Athletic Department will begin Tuesday, March 25. The walks, held on Tuesdays and Thursdays from March 25th to April 24th, leave from YUHS, 17 Hillhouse Avenue at 12:10 pm. Led by Larry Matthews, Associate Director of Sports and Recreation, Payne Whitney Gymnasium, the sessions meet rain or shine and are free and open to the Yale community. Participants walk at their own pace.

This year's theme is *Work together, walk together*. Come with a friend or colleague. Bring your whole department! For more information call 203-432-1892. No registration is required.

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Please remember that free parking for YHP members is available both in the lot right next to 17 Hillhouse Avenue and in parking lot 37, just across Trumbull Street.

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