

UAMS

**"Confidentiality is everyone's job,
not everyone's business."**

HIPAA Office, November 15, 2006

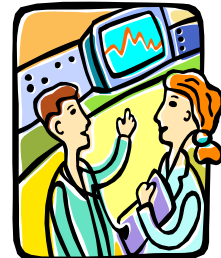
DID YOU KNOW . . . ?

HIPAA does not preclude healthcare professionals from engaging in confidential conversations even if there is a possibility that they could be overheard. HIPAA recognizes that oral communications often must occur freely and quickly in treatment settings in order to provide effective and high quality health care, and that it may be unreasonable to think that we can completely eliminate the possibility of conversations being overheard in these settings. Thus, HIPAA requires that we must take reasonable steps to keep persons from overhearing verbal conversations about a patient's PHI.

What does reasonable mean?

The word 'reasonable' is included in the Rule to provide a degree of flexibility and adaptability that allows a healthcare organization the ability to provide patient care and related services, without unduly restricting the provision of such services. **Examples of reasonable safeguards at UAMS include:**

- Pulling curtains in semi-private rooms when discussing a patient's information.
- Using private areas to discuss patient information when possible.
- Speaking in a softer tone of voice when it is necessary to have conversations about patients in non-private areas of a patient care unit or clinic.



The following are examples of permissible practices, if reasonable precautions are taken to minimize the chance of incidental disclosures to others who may be nearby:

- Health care staff may coordinate services at nursing stations.
- Nurses or other health care professionals may discuss a patient's condition over the phone with the patient or a provider.
- A physician may review a patient's treatment plan in his or her semi-private room.
- Health care professionals may discuss a patient's condition during training rounds.

It is **not** permissible to talk about a patient's PHI on elevators, in the cafeteria or other public areas, such as the Coffee Beanery.

For more helpful tips to protect our patient's PHI, read [HIPAA Hints](#) and the [UAMS Safeguarding PHI Policy 3.1.38](#) in the Administrative Guide.

Is there a topic you'd like to see covered? Email us at HIPAA@UAMS.EDU. Questions? Call the HIPAA Office at (501) 603-1379.