

HIPAA Hints

Tips for Keeping Voicemail Private for Patients

By Bill Dobbins, MPA

Voicemail can be an effective tool in keeping our patients informed about upcoming appointments or to notify them in case of a schedule change. However, there can be problems if vigilance is not taken when leaving a message that meets the standard of 'minimum necessary'. There is a risk of breaching a patient's protected health information (PHI) if he or she has other family members living in the home.

Consider the following scenario:

Mr. Harley suspects that he has a medical condition, but he does not want to reveal it to his family until he gets the complete news from his doctor about his lab results. After returning from dinner out with his wife, he notices that the voicemail indicator on his cordless speaker phone is blinking. He pushes the button on the handset and gets the following message: "Mr. Harley, this is Mary from the Gastroenterology Clinic and I'm calling about the results of your recent lab test."

When making calls to patients, observe the following practices from **UAMS policy 3.1.18- Safeguarding PHI:**

- When leaving a voicemail or answering a machine message for a patient, always limit the amount of information disclosed to the minimum necessary, such as the provider name and telephone number, or other information necessary to confirm an appointment, or to ask the individual to call back. For example, when confirming an appointment, the information should be limited to appointment date and time, the doctor's name, and a contact name and telephone number.
- Do not leave messages that include laboratory and test results, or any other information that links a patient's name to a particular medical condition or the type of clinic or specialist the patient is seeing. (For example, "I am calling to remind Mrs. Brown of her chemotherapy treatment tomorrow at 10:00 a.m.," is not an appropriate message.)
- Generally, when leaving a message with a family member or friend answering the patient's phone, the message should be limited to a request for the patient to return your call; and you may leave your name, telephone number, and the fact that you work at UAMS.
- A patient's verbal permission or written authorization is NOT needed in these circumstances when leaving a message for the patient as directed by this policy and procedure.

The HIPAA office is here to assist you with best practices for safeguarding PHI. Please call (501) 603-1379 or e-mail HIPAA@uams.edu. Additional resources are available on our web page at <http://hipaa.uams.edu>.

Nov. Blood Drive

The next American Red Cross blood drive on campus will be held November 12–13 from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on the first floor of the UAMS College of Public Health (next to Boulevard Bread).

All donors will receive a \$5 meal ticket which can be redeemed at Doc Java, the Sage Deli, or UAMS Cafeteria.

Make an appointment to minimize your wait time at www.givelife.org. Enter Sponsor Code: UAMS.

Visit our web site at www.uams.edu/blooddrive for information about future blood drives.



Hand Hygiene Staff Challenge ANSWERS

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| 1. True | 4. True |
| 2. False | 5. True |
| 3. True | 6. False |