HIPAA HITECH EXPRESS

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What's Stopping Adoption of Social Networks in Healthcare

Internet based social networks and information exchanges can enable communication, collaboration and information sharing in health care. Approximately 55% of Americans get information about a therapy or medical condition online. And not surprisingly 33% of people who go online use social networks to find fellow patients and discuss their conditions. Some of the more prominent sites include *Patients Like Me, MedHelp, CureTogether and DailyStrength*. Social networks hold considerable potential value and risk for health care organizations because they can be used to reach stakeholders, aggregate information and leverage collaboration.

As more patients use social networks to track their health conditions, health care organizations have an opportunity to interact with their members online. However, due to regulatory, liability and resource issues, social networking and increased information exchange in the healthcare sector continues to lag behind other industries.

So what are the risks and concerns preventing more wide spread use of electronic information exchange in healthcare?

Liability Concerns
Communications between health care providers and their patients are subject to HIPAA, which limits what information hospitals, physicians and insurance plans can provide through social networking. Also, providers continue to be hesitant to provide any personal health information electronically even though a key component of the Meaningful Use statute is patient access to health information.

Consumer Trust
The internet and social networking suffer from a continuing concern about misinformation, data accuracy and validity. There is also the ever increasing concern about data privacy, security and piracy. Additionally, recent surveys have shown health insurance plans, hospitals and drug manufacturers are the least trusted sources of health information.

Resources
Staying in contact with patients through email or messaging, or operating a social networking site requires time and effort to maintain user engagement and gain a return. Most physicians and hospitals have not developed a plan on how to allow and control patient access to PHI data or utilize social networking to facilitate communication. Even as providers focus on maintaining their bottom line, investment in electronic communication will become a necessity.

Patients increasingly depend on social networks to help them choose providers, determine a course of treatment and manage their health risks. Thus, providers will face challenges in adapting to this new technology, complying with regulations and acting on potential opportunities. Physicians and hospitals will have to weigh the benefits of increased patient interaction against the costs and risks.

The HIPAA HITECH EXPRESS Team

KeySys Health & Inforistec are Women-Owned, Accounting and Technology Firms that have come together to provide a complete solution to help healthcare organizations transform a potentially complex and difficult security and privacy compliance effort into a straight forward process. The solution, HIPAA HITECH Express offers clients a comprehensive, documented, manageable HIPAA security risk compliance process.

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