Is Your Lab HIPAA Compliant?

By Robert Reynolds

HIPAA stands for the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act and was enacted by the United States Congress and signed by then President Bill Clinton in 1996. This piece of federal legislation was created to help consumers maintain their coverage. It also included separate provisions such as The Security Rule to further protect them.

What Is the Security Rule?

The HIPAA Security Rule was designed to protect consumers electronic personal health information. The rule mandates that appropriate safeguards (i.e., administrative, physical, and technical safeguards) are put in place to ensure the confidentiality and security of sensitive electronic health information.

The Privacy Rule, however, allows a covered entity to disclose sensitive patient health information for a few reasons. A covered entity can disclose PHI (Personal Health Information) for research and public health purposes if certain conditions are met. Disclosures can be made by an HIO (Health Insuring Organization), on behalf of a covered entity/entities, given that the HIO and covered entities satisfy all Privacy Rule conditions, and disclosures are authorized by the HIO under a business associate agreement.

How Can Labs Better Protect Personal Health Information?

Many labs are beginning to incorporate the use of more modern versions of LIS (Laboratory Information System) into their practices. LIS is a software-based solution with features designed to support the daily operations of a laboratory's operations in a secure and simple, yet sophisticated manner. The main purpose of this technology is to store and track clinical details about a patient and store the information in a cloud/local database, to use as a reference for future visits. Physicians and lab technicians are the main utilizers of this technology, as it helps them coordinate an assortment of patient medical testing such as chemistry, hematology, immunology, and microbiology. Features of modern LIS systems include:

- **High Configurable Data Tables** – This allows a lab to define and capture all essential result elements that combine to create a comprehensive report for each test in a menu (which includes images and a calculated date).
- **Batch/Run Management** – This function allows you to create and manage batches for analysis, as well as plate assignment, mapping, and communications with automated platforms.
- **Efficient Workflows** – This allows you to define specific code enabled workflows, samples, or batches to efficiently track location and phase of processing in an expedited manner.
- **Documentation Processing** – LIS software allows the scanning, attaching, and linking of a document such as external patient medical records, lab reports, images, signed forms and links patient's documentation with family members to higher productivity and efficiency.
- **Integration** – With LIS software you can implement instrumentation that includes results and release capabilities.

What Are the Benefits of LIS Software?

- Gain the ability to handle molecular disciplines and workflows (i.e., PCR, FISH, Karyotyping, Immunology, and DNA Sequencing).
- Automated rules-based logic can be used for reflexive and confirmatory testing.
- Labs can use specimen storage manager to keep track of where and when specimens are stored for easy access and retrieval.
- With the ability to link a patient's complete medical history as well as their families, diagnosis capabilities and predictive outcomes are enhanced.

- Supports multiple signatures on a case, based on testing performed by a technologist, pathologist, or geneticist.
- Integrates reporting tools such as Pharmacogenomics to support customized medicine incentives.

For patient-centric labs, it is important to have a system that is HIPAA compliant, ensuring all sensitive patient medical histories are safe and secure as well as one that increases the overall efficiency and productivity of the lab. LIS systems are an amazing tool in regard to helping create barriers to prevent unauthorized personnel from gaining access to confidential information.

If you have any questions or experience with laboratory intelligence systems (LIS), please fill out the contact form on the Psychē Knowledge Center web page today.