

Compliance Education

HIPAA Tip Sheet: Minimum Necessary

The Minimum Necessary Standard, an important part of the HIPAA Privacy Rule, strikes a balance that permits important uses of PHI, while protecting the privacy of people who seek care and healing. The [Minimum Necessary Rule](#) requires that we take reasonable steps to limit the PHI to the minimum amount necessary to accomplish the intended purpose of the use, disclosure, or request.

WHO: Only those individuals with a “need to know” to perform their job responsibilities should have access to PHI.

WHAT: Your level of access to PHI depends on your job responsibilities. Remember, just because you have access does not mean you have the right to look.  No! No! No!

In order to stay compliant, VNS Health employees should:

- Not Access/Use information about:
 - Themselves, their family members, or coworkers
 - Patients/members when it is not needed to perform their job
 - Celebrities or other famous people
- Never Discuss information:
 - Interesting cases with other employees, unless it is job related
 - About any patient/member with family or friends
- Avoid Sharing/Disclosing:
 - PHI that exceeds the request and/or is outside of the required timeframe
 - Sensitive information, especially Social Security number, unless absolutely necessary
 - Emails to unnecessary recipients, such as large distribution groups; avoid hitting “Reply-All” by taking off anyone who doesn’t need the PHI or consider deleting the PHI if it is not needed

Before accessing, using, disclosing, or requesting PHI, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I need this information to complete the task at hand?
- Could I complete this job with a lesser amount of PHI?
- Am I sharing too much PHI with a colleague, provider, or vendor?
- Am I disclosing information only with those who need to know?

Tip: The Minimum Necessary Rule goes both ways – do not ask for PHI that you do not need to do your job.

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For routine HIPAA questions, please contact the HIPAA and Privacy Team at their email:

HIPAA@vnshealth.org

Report potential violations via web at www.vnshealth.ethicspoint.com or

VNS Health Compliance Hotline at 1-888-634-1558