What are HIOs and PHRs?

In April of 2008, the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC) published a report defining several key health information technology (HIT) terms. Operating under the theory that a shared language is critical to ensuring adoption of HIT, the report defines terms that are the building blocks for the effective use and sharing of health-related information. Among these newly defined terms are Health Information Organizations and Personal Health Records.

Health Information Organizations (HIOs)

An HIO oversees and governs the exchange of health-related information among organizations. HIOs perform oversight and governance functions for health information exchanges, which may include:

- Facilitation of operations associated with the movement of information;
- Accountability for abiding by regulatory requirements; and
- Adoption of standards ensuring interoperability while protecting information confidentiality and security

Examples of HIOs include: health data banks, specialty care organizations, and integrated delivery networks.

Personal Health Records (PHRs)

A PHR is a portable electronic record of an individual's health-related information that can be drawn from multiple sources (such as clinicians, health insurers, and public health entities) and is managed, shared, and controlled by the individual. What distinguishes a PHR from an electronic medical or health record is that the information a PHR contains is under the control of the individual, who can decide what information to include, how the PHR is maintained and ordered, and who can read its contents.

HIOs, PHRs, and HIPAA

These terms can be critical to understanding how HIPAA and other laws affect you. For example, one of the most significant changes made in the January 2013 HIPAA Omnibus Final Rulemaking was the expansion of the definition of "business associate," which now includes:

- An **HIO**, E-prescribing Gateway, or other entity that provides data transmission of protected health information to a covered entity or its business associate and requires access on a routine basis to such protected health information; and
- An entity that offers a **PHR** to one or more individuals on behalf of a covered entity.

A business associate is now directly liable for violations of applicable HIPAA requirements and must have an agreement in place with any entity from which it receives protected health information. HIOs and PHR vendors that fall within the new definition may need to adopt structural and operational changes to comply with HIPAA.

We will continue to expand our library of Fast Facts addressing key concepts in health information law and policy.

For more definitions of essential terms, see our Glossary at www.healthinfolaw.org/article/glossary.
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