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The Importance of Confidentiality and Information Security in Nursing

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Abstract

This paper explores two published articles that discuss managing security in the electronic health record and how email transmissions with protected health information (PHI) requires confidentiality and privacy notices. Gorzin, Khoshkam, Roudbari, and Samadbeik (2015) article was aimed to manage nursing data security in the electronic health record (EHR) and discover the viewpoints of hospital information system vendors and hospital information technology specialists about nursing data security. Bouregy and Wians (2013) article discusses the myths regarding e-mail transmissions of PHI and discusses appropriate verbiage in confidentiality/privacy notices intended to manage the risk of a breach of confidentiality/privacy when PHI is transmitted by e-mail. This paper will examine how confidentiality and information security is a vital aspect for nurses to recognize and adhere when protecting patient healthcare information.

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**Introduction**

Patients have the right to privacy and confidentiality regarding their healthcare information. The Electronic Health Record (EHR) is a patient care information resource for clinicians and nursing documentation that is an essential part of comprehensive patient care (Bouregy and Wians, 2013). After the evolution of paper-based medical records to EHR, the United States legislative developed a privacy act that was designed to secure and protect patient’s medical information.

**Discussion**

Public Law 104-191: The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) was enacted into law with the purpose to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986; to improve portability and continuity of health insurance coverage in the group and individual markets; combat waste, fraud, and abuse in health insurance and health care delivery; promote the use of medical savings accounts; improve access to long-term care services and coverage; simplify the administration of health insurance coverage; cover “other purposes (i.e., those inadvertently omitted from the initial law of future events/conditions that may impact any of the previously stated purposes of HIPAA) (Bouregy and Wians, 2013). HIPPA protects and gives patients the right to control who has access to their healthcare information. It is required that the patient sign a medical release form to authorize certain persons and representatives to have access to their medical information. It is significant for nurses to know and follow the policies and procedures in protecting patient information.

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The Privacy Rule provides patients with certain rights regarding their protected health information (PHI) and sets limits on how PHI can be used internally and disclosed externally by any entity subject to the Privacy Rule, including health plans, health care providers, and health care clearinghouses (Bouregy and Wians, 2013). The privacy rule provides that only healthcare team members that are responsible for the patient’s direct care are allowed access to their medical records. The patient’s medical records must be kept in a secure area and not visible to the public. If patient information is sent via email, it should be secured, and the agency has ensured that all required network security measures are in place. When these protective measures are implemented within an agency, it dramatically decreases the chance of a breach in patient confidentiality.

According to Gorzin, Khoshkam, Roudbari, and Samadbeik (2015), their study revealed that username and password were the most essential methods to authenticate the nurses, with the mean percent of 95% and 80%, respectively, and the most significant level of information security protection was assigned to administrative and local controls. Healthcare agencies are responsible for complying with HIPAA regulations that monitor staff adherence to privacy and data safety. When healthcare agencies assign nurses with usernames, it keeps a record of who is accessing patient information and what is being retrieved. As nurses, it is important not to share usernames and passwords with others, log off the EHR before leaving the computer monitor, never leave any printed or written patient information about patients where others can access it, and not to discuss any patient information with staff members who are not directly caring for the patient.

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**Conclusion**

Nurses should be mindful of the importance of protecting confidentiality and information security with patient data. HIPAA is a major component in securing patient privacy. To gain a complete understanding of the nurse’s role in protecting patient’s healthcare information, one must be knowledgeable of the agencies policies and procedures.

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