



In this issue:

Using Texting Safely for Client Engagement



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Virtual visits and communication have been a staple in maintaining safe, consistent care throughout the pandemic and beyond. Even without the influence of COVID-19 within the healthcare systems, [messaging is the preferred way many clients want to communicate.](#)

Unlike phone calls, texting or SMS, leaves a traceability that provides potential issues with HIPAA compliance. There are a few ways to take advantage of the increase in responsiveness and cost effectiveness of communicating through text all while also keeping client information private and secure.

Incorporating texting to your clients could influence your efficiency. Many EHRs or administrative software offer options for automated appointment reminders. This can help with a reduction in patient no-show rates and since you aren't disseminating personal health information, this type of text reminder generally doesn't violate HIPAA regulations.



In addition, many EHR vendors that can offer an

app component integrate secure and safe texting for clinicians to communicate sensitive information on a HIPAA compliant platform. This can be a useful tool to make sure you are getting the most out of your EHR/EMR systems. There are pros and cons of implementing these types of programs. This may come with increased operating cost for secure PHI compliant software, but the value is a system that safeguards sensitive client information. A private communications network would be the preferred method of communication if the birth center is intending to use text as a method to discuss PHI.



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If there isn't an option to incorporate a specific encrypted program, the issue then becomes what about when clients' quickest and easiest form of communication is also through text or SMS? What constitutes an appropriate medical text message? Things like reminders or other communication that pertain to appointments, lab results, discharge instructions or prescription notifications are all valid via text. When using electronic communications, like text or SMS messaging, the birth center staff need to be mindful of the **content** being sent, **who** is receiving the messages, and if **consent was given** for this form of communication. While HIPAA security rules do not have text-specific requirements, they do have regulations surrounding electronic communications, which would apply to SMS messaging. To adhere to the rule any messaging would need to ensure

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KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- * The best form of electronic communication is through **HIPAA compliant programs** that ensure safe and secure data transmission.
- * If you're using traditional SMS or text methods, be mindful of **the type of content** you're sending over the phone. Be sure you keep PHI to a minimum to respect client's rights.
- * Use best practices and **think from a compliance not convenience perspective**. Do you have safeguards in place to protect client information? Are you using your own personal mobile phone? Do you have a robust P&P for implementing technology?
- * **Consent is key!** Be sure your clients are aware of any technological updates your office may have.

"confidentiality, integrity and availability of PHI". Because these can be difficult to control via phone messaging, it makes the use of text via personal mobile devices to send information difficult.



In an effort towards transparency, incorporating updated technology within your consent form is an important step to ensuring patients are informed and educated about how and when their personal health information could be shared or discussed. Consent and opting in and out of text

messaging are two ways to ensure that you'll be meeting the needs of both the client and complying with the law.

Be sure to include any communication changes within your policy and procedure manual, as well as appropriate staff training. There may be a slight learning curve, which often can be expected when new technology is introduced, or a new practice is put into place. But in spite of the challenges, secure and smart texting is the best way to ensure communication is HIPAA compliant.

About the Author: CABC Staff Member Abbie Synan has served CABC in many capacities, including Commissioner, panelist, and site visitor. Formerly a birth center Administrator, Abbie is an AABC Foundation Board member and enjoys traveling in her free time.

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