

## **HIPAA Privacy: Working with Florida's Poison Control Centers**

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Since their inception in 1999, the three regional poison control centers in Jacksonville, Miami, and Tampa that make up the Florida Poison information Center Network have played a significant role in assessing, triaging, managing, and monitoring known or suspected poisonings across the state, while also playing an important role in epidemiologic surveillance. Under Section 395.1027, Florida Statutes, the regional poison control centers provide case management of poison cases, as well as professional consultation to health care practitioners. In order to fulfill their role, however, the centers need to have access to patient information, both when first presenting to the hospital and follow-up regarding response to treatment.

Since the April 2003 compliance under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) privacy standards, the centers have met with considerable resistance from health care providers, primarily outside the emergency department setting, to share protected patient information. When a poison victim presents for service, staff in the emergency department contacts the regional poison control center for assistance in the diagnosis and treatment of the patient. When the patient is later admitted to a nursing unit, the poison control center staff is often unable to obtain patient information and response to treatment.

Since Florida Statutes require the poison control centers to be involved with the case management of poison cases, FHA urges hospitals to take the following steps to assure appropriate care for victims of known or suspected poisonings:

- Inform hospital personnel of the function of the poison control centers.
- Document contact with the regional poison control center in the ED record
- Educate unit personnel that, in response to requests for patient information, to get a number and call back the poison control center to confirm the authority and identity of those making requests for patient information. As an alternative, hospitals could request that

the poison control centers fax requests for follow-up information, assuming that it is clear where such requests should be faxed.

FHA is also working with the Department of Health to clarify the statutory language associated with data collection by the Florida Poison information Center-Network and the requirement for licensed hospitals to work with the poison control centers on behalf of their patients.

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