



## Managing Information Privacy & Security in Healthcare

### HIPAA Facts and Myths

By Ted Cooper, MD

As if implementing the HIPAA standards were not sufficiently challenging for healthcare enterprises, the task may be further complicated by myths and half-truths about the law and its requirements. Determining the source of these myths is elusive, but they seem to come from multiple sources, including overly zealous privacy consultants, paranoid providers overreacting to the legal threat, and vendors eager to sell their security or transaction widgets.

A common early myth was "HIPAA is our next Y2K. We'll meet the deadlines and then move on." Once the realization that HIPAA was not a one-time event, but a fundamental change in the way healthcare conducts business, denial set in, and rumors of the Bush Administration's plans to repeal HIPAA were circulated. Today, the most common myths involve about products that promise to deliver "HIPAA compliance" and folklore about privacy prohibitions, some of which can be damaging to patients and their families. For example, we recently learned about an incident in which, following a tragic accident in which a number of people were injured, a hospital attempted to help children locate their parents by calling other hospitals in the area. Several of the hospitals called refused to disclose whether they were treating the named individuals – "because of HIPAA."

The HIMSS Privacy and Security Task Force recognizes the counterproductive nature of these myths and seeks to dispel them. Toward that end, readers are directed to the following Web sites to address myths surrounding HIPAA and attempt to separate myth from reality.

"HIPAA Myths and Facts," American Health Information Management Organization  
[http://www.ahima.org/pdf\\_files/HIPS\\_Mythsfootnotes.pdf](http://www.ahima.org/pdf_files/HIPS_Mythsfootnotes.pdf)

"Myths and Facts about the HIPAA Privacy Rule," Health Privacy Project,  
[http://www.healthprivacy.org/newsletter-url2306/newsletter-url\\_show.htm?doc\\_id=173459](http://www.healthprivacy.org/newsletter-url2306/newsletter-url_show.htm?doc_id=173459)