



Timely Information for Personal Success

Changes in Store for HIPAA

By Twila Brase

A proposed change to the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) Privacy Rule would *give patients some rights to discover who had electronically accessed their protected health information*. But the rule change does NOT give patients full accessibility to those who had infringed on their privacy rights regarding sensitive health information.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Office for Civil Rights is proposing changes to the Privacy Rule as part of the Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health (HITECH) Act. HHS says that the proposed rule would promote accountability across the health care system and work to ensure that providers properly protect health information.

But there are still holes in the privacy system, and citizens should be informed about all the ways their private health information can be accessed. Despite statements to the contrary, the proposed changes to the HIPAA Privacy Rule do NOT give individuals the right to a full accounting of those who access their medical records.

There are myriad exceptions. For example, if another law requires disclosure of health data, even if the patient knows nothing about that law, the patient will NOT be informed – nor will it tell the *purpose* of the disclosure.

According to the new rule, patients could obtain an access report and then, if they believed their privacy rights were violated, and then file a complaint with the Office for Civil Rights.

Overall, the health privacy system remains flawed. Congress and federal officials have foisted the electronic medical record system on citizens without their consent. Citizens must now demand that the so-called HIPAA Privacy Rule require that patients receive a complete and comprehensive accounting of who looked at and used their private information. ❖

Twila Brase is president of the Citizens' Council for Health Freedom (www.cchfreedom.org).

Mistaken Depression

When someone develops depression, the brain usually becomes the focus of attention. But other organs can be the source of the problem. A common example is when the thyroid gland produces too little hormone – a condition known as hypothyroidism.

Nearly 10 million Americans suffer from hypothyroidism, a condition in which the thyroid gland is underactive. In some people, hypothyroidism may be mistaken for depression. These individuals may be prescribed an antidepressant, rather than the thyroid medication that they really need.

What is it?

The thyroid gland is a small butterfly-shaped structure in the neck. Although it weighs less than an ounce, the thyroid exerts a powerful influence throughout the body. It does so by secreting hormones that control how fast and efficiently cells convert nutrients into energy (metabolism). By regulating metabolism, the thyroid indirectly affects every cell, tissue, and organ in the body — including the brain.

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Healthy Recipe: Amazing Pea Soup

INGREDIENTS:

- 12 cups water
- 2 pounds English peas with shells
- 1/3 cup finely chopped fresh dill, plus sprigs for garnish
- 1 teaspoon salt & freshly ground pepper, to taste
- 3/4 cup low-fat plain yogurt

NUTRITIONAL VALUE:

- Calories per serving: 79
- Carbohydrates: 13 g.
- Protein: 6 g.
- Sodium: 429 mg.
- Fat: 1 g.
- Saturated fat: 0 g.
- Fiber: 4 g.



DIRECTIONS:

❶ Bring water to boil in a large pot. Add peas, return to boil and then reduce to simmer. Cook, stirring occasionally, for 45 minutes. ❷ Transfer one-third of peas to a food processor. Add ½ cup cooking liquid, process until smooth. Pour into large bowl. Repeat with remaining peas in 2 batches, with ½ cup cooking liquid each time. Pour pureed peas plus remaining cooking liquid through a sieve, pressing on solids to extract as much liquid as possible. ❸ Return soup to pot, bring to boil and then simmer, 30-35 minutes. Stir in chopped dill, salt and pepper. Ladle into bowls and top each with a swirl of yogurt and a sprig of dill.

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Questions and Answers

Promotions Without Raises?

Q: *I like where I work, and I was recently offered a promotion. This sounds good, but I wasn't offered a pay raise. Is this normal? Should I take the promotion?*

A: This isn't as unusual as you might think. A surprising one in five (22%) of respondents to a recent OfficeTeam survey revealed this practice is at least somewhat common at their companies. Some companies may want to reward employees for taking on heavier workloads but aren't able to offer immediate raises due to budget constraints. In those situations, the intent may be to provide a higher salary as soon as the firm is more financially stable.

That being said, professionals should think carefully about taking on increased responsibilities if a raise isn't in the offing. The following are a few incentives you may be able to negotiate:

- **More vacation time.** Consider asking for a few extra days or weeks off each year.
- **Flexible schedules.** The ability to work from home or commute during off-hours may save you time and money.
- **Bonuses and Classes.** The company could also offer a bigger end-of-year bonus or pay for a course related to your professional development. ❖

Source: OfficeTeam (www.officeteam.com).

Mistaken Depression

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An underactive thyroid can cause symptoms similar to depression. However, the problem is more likely to be hypothyroidism when people also experience dry skin and hair, hoarseness or a slowed heart rate. (Additional traits appear below.) The following are some shared symptoms – and other signs that differ from depression:

Shared Symptoms

- Depressed mood;
- Fatigue;
- Weight gain;
- Reduced sex drive; and
- Trouble concentrating.

More Typical of Depression

- Insomnia;
- Restlessness; and
- Feelings of worthlessness and/or guilt.

More Likely Hypothyroidism

- Feeling chilled;
- Muscle cramps or stiffness; and
- Constipation.

Detection

The thyroid is regulated by the pituitary or “master” gland. Assuming the pituitary is functioning normally, TSH levels rise. Physicians often use the TSH level to help make a diagnosis of hypothyroidism.

When thyroid hormone levels are low, many organs slow down, creating a wide range of symptoms – including depression. People over 60 may have only one symptom – such as mood impairment or difficulty concentrating.

Treatment

Treatment usually involves taking a medication once a day to restore thyroid hormone levels to normal. Several options exist.

The most commonly prescribed drug is a purified form of synthetic T4, levothyroxine (Levothroid, Synthroid, and others). Levothyroxine works in the same way natural thyroid hormone does, provides stable levels of hormone, and is well absorbed.

Thyroid medications are sometimes added to antidepressant treatment to improve mood — even when thyroid function is normal. Clinicians usually recommend liothyronine (T3 hormone) to augment antidepressant therapy, but in some cases they recommend levothyroxine (T4). One theory is that thyroid drugs act in concert with antidepressants in the brain. Another idea is that thyroid pills boost chemical activity in the brain, improving mood and concentration. ❖

Source: Harvard Health Publications.