

POSTER ABSTRACTS

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The HIPAA AnswerBoard: Documenting and Sharing Organizational Learning

Christine C. Stewart, Group Health Cooperative/Center for Health Studies

Background: The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) raises many new compliance issues for researchers in health care organizations. While there is a great deal of HIPAA-related information on the internet, the layering of federal, state, and organizational policy means that many resolutions are organization-specific. We sought to create retrievable documentation on HIPAA-related issues specific to research at our organization, starting early in the implementation of the HIPAA Privacy Rule in 2003.

Methods: The AnswerBoard is a web application that displays information in a categorized question-and-answer format on the Center for Health Studies (CHS) Intranet. Members of the CHS HIPAA committee post new information via the web interface as questions are raised and resolved. The application was built using Microsoft ASP.NET and a SQL Server 2000 database, and was designed to be easily re-used for other topics.

Results: The AnswerBoard provides a first stop for staff to look for the answer to any HIPAA question. Each question can be listed under several categories, making it easy to find an area of interest. Answers may contain links to other web sites. When new questions arise, they are brought to the CHS HIPAA Committee, and after the issue is resolved, it will be added to the AnswerBoard's content.

Conclusions: The HIPAA AnswerBoard has increased the transparency of emerging HIPAA policies in our department, and eliminated time spent "re-inventing the wheel" as the same issues recur over time in different projects. The AnswerBoard application is generic and appropriate for documenting any developing body of knowledge and has two significant advantages over the typical "frequently-asked questions" web page. First, the categorization of questions permits easy navigation through a large volume of items, and second, the web interface for posting new information means that subject-area experts can update the information without relying on a web designer or developer.