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The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act or HIPAA, for short, is a part of new Federal Government regulations which have been passed to standardize privacy and security requirements across the different types of healthcare organizations.

HIPAA does three primary things:

- * It helps standardize and simplify the way health care organizations exchange electronic health care data.
- * It provides consumers with additional protections for getting and maintaining health insurance coverage.
- * It creates new security rules to ensure the safety and privacy of individual health information and medical records.

Every time you go to see a therapist, a doctor, are admitted to a hospital, fill a prescription or send a claim to an insurance company, a record is made of your confidential health information. This type of information is referred to as individual identifiable health information and is the type of information regulated by HIPAA. It can be used in any format- electronic, written or oral.

Health care organizations that collect and manage this type of information are therefore covered by these regulations including social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, physicians, dentists, physical therapists, chiropractors, optometrists, podiatrists and others: hospitals, health plans, employers, health care clearinghouses such as claims processors, and other health care organizations who conduct administrative and financial transactions.

Under HIPAA, you have new rights to understand and control how your health information is used:

- * Health care providers and health care plans are now required to provide you with a clear written explanation of how they intend to use and disclose your information.
- * You have the right to see and get copies of your records, request changes and receive a history of non-routine disclosures of your personal information.
- * Health care providers are required to obtain prior consent before sharing personal health information for purposes other than treatment, payment and health care operations.
- * You have the right to file a formal complaint if you believe that violations of the regulations were made.

Attached are the *Policies and Practices* to protect the privacy of your health information. These *Policies and Practices* are compliant with Illinois law and with the new Federal Government HIPAA regulations.