

# THE ADVISOR

MONTHLY COMPLIANCE COMMUNICATOR

## Understanding the Role of a HIPAA Compliance Officer

Healthcare regulations are continuously changing making the role of a HIPAA Compliance Officer paramount. This individual serves as the guardian of patient data privacy and ensures that healthcare organizations adhere to the guidelines set forth by HIPAA. Their duties are diverse, ranging from program implementation to educational outreach, and their traits are crucial for effective execution.

### Key Responsibilities

The duties of a HIPAA compliance officer vary depending on the size and scope of the organization's compliance program. However, the core responsibilities typically include:

- Designing, implementing, overseeing, and monitoring the compliance program.
- Reporting regularly to the organization's governing body, CEO, and compliance committee (if applicable).
- Continuously reviewing the compliance program's effectiveness.
- Developing and participating in educational and training initiatives.
- Ensuring awareness of compliance requirements among consultants, vendors, and agents.
- Serving as a resource for compliance-related information.
- Conducting exclusion checks and addressing positive findings.
- Assisting with internal compliance reviews and investigations.
- Identifying root causes of noncompliance and developing corrective action plans.
- Monitoring the effectiveness of corrective action plans.
- Establishing mechanisms for reporting potential noncompliance issues.

### Traits of a Good HIPAA Compliance Officer

The role of a HIPAA Compliance Officer requires a unique set of qualities to effectively navigate the complexities of healthcare regulations. These traits include:

## Newsletter Content

Understanding the Role of a HIPAA Compliance Officer

Exciting News About Our Online Compliance Manual Upgrade

Guidelines and Best Practices for Dental Unit Waterline Maintenance

It's Your Call

- **Industry Understanding:** A comprehension of the healthcare sector and its specific challenges is crucial for devising tailored compliance strategies.
- **Analytical Skills:** The ability to scrutinize organizational practices is essential for identifying potential compliance gaps.
- **Knowledge:** An understanding of applicable legal requirements is needed for ensuring compliance with HIPAA regulations and other relevant laws.
- **Communication Skills:** Strong written and verbal communication skills are vital for conveying compliance policies and procedures to all stakeholders effectively.
- **Approachability:** The Compliance Officer must be approachable, fostering an environment where employees feel comfortable seeking guidance on compliance matters.
- **Interpersonal Skills:** Building relationships and collaborating across departments require strong interpersonal skills.
- **Adaptability:** Given the dynamic nature of healthcare regulations, the ability to adapt to changes swiftly is crucial for maintaining compliance.
- **Discretion:** Handling sensitive information necessitates a high level of discretion and confidentiality.

### **Professional Standards**

As the compliance profession continues to evolve, it seeks to uphold standards of professionalism, integrity, and competence. Compliance officers are entrusted with public trust, necessitating adherence to ethical principles outlined by organizations like the Health Care Compliance Association (HCCA). These principles include obligations to the public, the employing organization, and the profession itself, emphasizing integrity, effectiveness, and professionalism in all endeavors.

With Total Medical Compliance, we offer on-site and online training options to not only train your staff, but to also train your HIPAA compliance officer to understand their roles and responsibilities. Contact us to get a free quote and see how we can help your practice.

## **Exciting News About Our Online Compliance Manual Upgrade**

We are thrilled to share some exciting news regarding our online manual system! Starting in May, our online compliance manuals are transitioning to a cutting-edge (and simpler) platform, and we're delighted to announce that the new TMC online manuals will now be powered by Box.com software.

This update is part of our commitment to simplifying the process of managing your online compliance manuals. The transition to Box will significantly reduce the time spent on manual administration tasks. The upgraded software is designed to streamline manual updates and adapt seamlessly to regulatory compliance changes. Additionally, it will provide enhanced customization options for your practice. Our primary goal is to ensure that the system remains user-friendly, intuitive, and responsive for your convenience.

If you are currently using our online manuals, you should have received the initial email communication regarding the release of the new software. If you missed this email, you can access the information [here](#).

For those who are not yet using our online manuals and are curious to explore its features, you can check out our products that showcase our online manuals.

Stay tuned for more information to our online compliance manuals in the next edition of our newsletter. We're committed to providing you with an improved and more efficient experience with our updated online manual system!

## **Guidelines and Best Practices for Dental Unit Waterline Maintenance**

Dental unit waterline (DUWL) maintenance and monitoring remains an area of concern for dental facilities. Agencies such as the CDC, FDA, and the ADA have issued guidance for dental offices on maintaining DUWL. It is the recommendation of these agencies that waterlines are to be treated with a disinfectant/chemical and then monitored (tested) to ensure the water quality meets the EPA safe drinking water standards of less than 500 colony forming units per milliliter of water.

Many dental settings use water from the municipal water supply through office plumbing. Dental units carry the water through the thin plastic tubing (hoses) to the air/water syringe, handpieces, and ultrasonic scalers to the patient's mouth. The inside of this tubing can become colonized with microorganisms called biofilm. These microorganisms can include bacteria, fungi, and protozoa. Biofilm can form in any water environment. The biofilm must be treated with a chemical disinfectant to be destroyed, making the water safe to deliver to patients.

There are several ways to treat biofilm. Contact the manufacturer of your dental units to find out which method(s) of treatment would work best for your dental unit. They may recommend a self-contained water system, an in-line filter, or a combination of these. Self-contained water systems are used with shock treatment, tablets, or straws with either distilled or potable water. Utilizing distilled or potable water alone in the self-contained system is not enough. The water must be treated to ensure safe drinking water standards are met. In-line filters have disinfectants in the filters to control the biofilm; thus, delivering safe water to patients.

Outbreaks of illness have occurred due to untreated DUWL, including one case in Georgia and another in California where pediatric dental patients developed Mycobacterium abscessus after treatment in pediatric dental practices. The infections required hospitalization of several children ranging in age from 4-8 years old. The infections were linked to the untreated contaminated water from dental units. Treatments varied from IV antibiotics to surgery for some of the cases.

Once you have determined the DUWL treatment that is best for your facility, the CDC recommends that you consult with the manufacturer on the frequency of monitoring (testing). However, even if the manufacturer does not recommend routine monitoring, the CDC does recommend routine monitoring. Monitoring dental unit water quality helps identify any problems in performance or

adherence with maintenance protocols. It also provides documentation of compliance. Monitoring is the only way to ensure your product is working for you and that safe drinking water standards are met. OSAP recommends that testing of DUWL be done at least quarterly. ADA also recommends routine monitoring of DUWL. If the manufacturer issues no guidance for monitoring, the facility should monitor (test) on a routine basis. TMC recommends using the strictest standards, which is OSAP's at least quarterly recommendation.

Testing of DUWL can be performed by using commercial self-contained test kits or commercial water-testing laboratories. If your water quality doesn't meet drinking water standards, actions should take place to correct the issue. Those actions could include a shock treatment followed by treatment (straws, tablet, in-line filter) and then re-testing immediately after treatment. However, always consult with the manufacturer of the product or dental equipment for guidance.

Dental unit water that is not treated is likely to contain high numbers of microorganisms and most likely will not meet drinking water standards. Not treating DUWL is inconsistent with accepted infection control principles. Dental facilities should work with equipment manufacturers to ensure their water treatment meets or exceeds the standards set by the EPA for safe drinking water.

## It's Your Call – March 2024

### **OSHA/Infection Control: What is the appropriate cleaning method for heavy duty utility gloves?**

It is best to follow the manufacturer's instructions for use because the methods vary. Here are some variations that you may find:

- Autoclavable up to 5 times
- Not autoclavable. Wash with mild soap and water. Hang to dry.

### **HIPAA: We are a small healthcare office, who is best suited to be assigned the role of Compliance Officer?**

Selecting the right HIPAA Compliance Officer for a small office is pivotal in safeguarding healthcare information. The ideal candidate should pay great attention to detail as this is crucial to prevent data breaches, and effective communication skills are necessary for training staff on HIPAA policies.

The Compliance Officer must exhibit problem-solving skills to assess and address potential risks, organizational skills to manage documentation and a sense of responsibility and accountability for ensuring the organization's compliance. Having a collaborative attitude in working with other team members is essential.

# THE ADVISOR

MONTHLY COMPLIANCE COMMUNICATOR

PRINT

SIGNATURE

DATE

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_
11. \_\_\_\_\_
12. \_\_\_\_\_
13. \_\_\_\_\_
14. \_\_\_\_\_
15. \_\_\_\_\_
16. \_\_\_\_\_
17. \_\_\_\_\_
18. \_\_\_\_\_
19. \_\_\_\_\_
20. \_\_\_\_\_
21. \_\_\_\_\_
22. \_\_\_\_\_
23. \_\_\_\_\_
24. \_\_\_\_\_
25. \_\_\_\_\_

## Instructions

Print and post newsletter in office for staff review. Each member should sign this form when completed. Keep on file as proof of training on these topics.

## Newsletter Content

Understanding the Role of a HIPAA Compliance Officer

Exciting News About Our Online Compliance Manual Upgrade

Guidelines and Best Practices for Dental Unit Waterline Maintenance

It's Your Call



Need to contact us? Scan the QR code for all the ways to get in touch!