

Family Doctors Are Not Immune to HIPAA



Some doctors think they are small enough to ignore HIPAA. They think the regulators are too busy watching large hospitals and insurers. They won't notice a small doctor's office that fails to comply, right?

Wrong. HIPAA applies to every doctor, pharmacist, and health care provider in the U.S. Almost anyone who handles healthcare data has to comply. The consequences for failing to do so can be huge.

The Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Civil Rights (OCR) is serious about enforcement. It has issued heavy fines to practices large and small:

- **Yakima Valley Memorial Hospital:** In 2023, this hospital was fined \$240,000 after an investigation revealed that security guards accessed the medical records of 419 individuals without a job-related purpose. The hospital agreed to update its policies and train its staff to prevent future violations ([HHS.gov](https://www.hhs.gov)).
- **UnitedHealthcare:** In 2023, UnitedHealthcare paid an \$80,000 settlement for failing to provide timely access to a patient's medical records. This case was part of the HIPAA Right of Access Initiative aimed at ensuring patients have timely access to their health information ([HealthITSecurity](https://www.healthitsecurity.com)).
- **Doctors' Management Services (DMS):** In 2023, DMS agreed to a \$100,000 settlement following a ransomware attack that affected the ePHI of approximately 200,000 individuals. OCR found that DMS failed to conduct a proper risk analysis and implement necessary security measures ([Compliance Group](https://www.compliancegroup.com)).

In each case, a small event led to an investigation by OCR. HIPAA violations were discovered and each organization paid dearly.

The fines represent only a fraction of the cost of a violation. Legal fees, consulting fees, and irreparable damage to a reputation can easily put a smaller practice underwater.

Expertise and Reliability for HIPAA Compliance

The key to complying with HIPAA is to find a partner with the right tools and expertise. The partner should be able to assist with risk assessments, solution deployment, security audits, and all other requirements. You need someone who knows the statutes and who can bring your team up to speed quickly.

Contact us today for a free HIPAA consultation. You'll see how easy it is to protect your practice.

