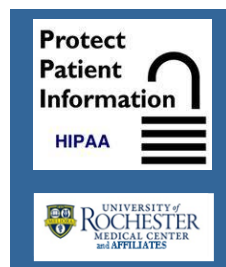


# HIPAA HIGHLIGHTS

*November 2023*



## ***Cell Phones and Social Media: HIPAA Danger Zones***

Personal cell phones and social media are danger zones for health care workers. While cell phones are a nearly automatic and integral part of personal life for many workers, you should think twice about using your cell phone at work, or to communicate about work. A good rule of thumb is to keep work and private lives separate. Thoughtless use of cell phones can lead to potential HIPAA breaches due to distraction or insensitivity to patient privacy. With social media, there's a good chance that if your post is about work, you may disclose PHI, whether in text or through photos.

URMC and Affiliates unfortunately has had HIPAA violations due to PHI disclosures via social media and texting. Some involve photos, e.g. "selfies" with eRecord screens or patient documents in the background, or photos or videos of patients without the required authorization. Unauthorized patient photo posts are not only a HIPAA violation, but a violation of URMC and Affiliate organizations' photography policies. Some posts or texts are not HIPAA violations, but are unprofessional and harmful to the reputation of both URMC and Affiliates and the worker. Many units and facilities have policies or codes of conduct that regulate cell phone use at work, and access to recordings of patients such as security footage, so be sure to familiarize yourself with applicable policies.

### **"Real World" Examples of HIPAA Violations via Cell Phones or Social Media:**

- Acknowledging that you cared for a patient/resident when a family member tags you in a post, e.g. " So glad we could get him home for the holidays"
- Private messaging your colleagues on Facebook that patient Smith is psychotic
- Posting a picture on Instagram of the coffee your coworker brought you, with PHI in the background
- Tweeting that the lacrosse player who was on the news after collapsing on the field is in surgery
- Posting a video on TikTok after finishing your shift, that describes details of your patient's care
- Giving out medications or documents to the wrong patient because you were distracted by your texts

Deliberate or thoughtless use of cell phones and social media in connection with your work can result in patient/resident/family distress, regulatory citations for the healthcare facility, and loss of employment for an employee.

### **Please think before you post!**

For additional information on any HIPAA-related topics, please refer to the URMC intranet site at <https://sites.mc.rochester.edu/departments/hipaa/> or contact your Privacy Officer or HIPAA Security Official at <http://sites.mc.rochester.edu/departments/hipaa/faqs-resources/hipaa-privacy-officers-and-security-officials/>.