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Complex patient privacy law prompts innovative solutions from PacificSource Health Plans

Employee training program wins first place in industry publication

Eugene, Ore. – PacificSource Health Plans was recently cited for exemplary training and communications practices in compliance with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), a complex federal patient privacy law.

HIPAA was enacted by Congress in 1996, and impacts all hospitals, health insurers, clinics and any services, facilities or providers that exchange health information on individuals. HIPAA is broad-sweeping legislation that impacts the exchange, confidentiality and security of health data and other personal information.

“This award is important because it tells our customers that we work hard to protect their health privacy,” says Lisa Zenev, PacificSource’s vice president of information technology. “HIPAA has transformed the way we process data. For example, we had to convert each of our members’ social security numbers to special codes so identifiable data could not be casually linked to any individual.” Specific examples include the development of InTouch®, a secure electronic data interchange application, featured on www.pacificsource.com. The Web site now features a special link entitled “Our Privacy Policy.”

The publication Briefings on HIPAA honored PacificSource for motivating and training employees through specialized and targeted communications, with an educational series called “P.S. Confidential” and intensive informational resources on the company’s Intranet that workers can refer to as new protective procedures are enacted.

“While the scope of HIPAA legislation was daunting at first, we have been able to work on our processes and technologies to comply with or exceed the new standards,” says PacificSource communications specialist Staci McDaniel, who is a member of the company’s internal HIPAA education committee. “One of the biggest challenges has been encouraging employees to think about HIPAA every day, and to develop fun educational materials to remind each of us what we need to do at our desks to protect member information.”

Other examples of organizational changes include the installation of e-mail encryption code on the network and employee training to ensure confidential information is kept out of view at employee workstations. Outside the company, PacificSource joined a cooperative group of providers, payers and institutions to standardize information and language required for claims payment and enrollment in anticipation of the next HIPAA deadline.

“HIPAA has such a huge impact on the delivery of healthcare,” says information services expert Zenev, who organized a seminar on HIPAA compliance for providers early last year. “Privacy is

important to us and to our members and we appreciate the recognition that we're acting in the best interests of our customers, vendors, members, partners and employees.”

About PacificSource Health Plans

PacificSource Health Plans – the oldest healthcare service contractor in the state – is based in Eugene, Ore. with satellite offices in Portland and Bend, Ore. Since 1933, the 200-employee organization has provided health insurance solutions to Oregon businesses and individuals.

PacificSource provides personalized medical and dental coverage to over 137,800 members through contracts with 9,000 physicians, physician organizations, hospitals, medical facilities and other healthcare suppliers. For more information, visit www.pacificsource.com.