

Lippincott's DocuCare and the HIPAA Privacy Act of 1996

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) was established in 1996 [<http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/privacy/>] to provide federal protections for personal health information. At the same time, HIPAA permits the use of personal health information for patient care and other important purposes.

Under HIPAA, health care providers (e.g. hospitals, nursing homes, physicians, nurses, other health care professionals) must comply with the Rules' requirements to protect the privacy and security of health information and must provide individuals with certain rights with respect to their health information. Moreover, HIPAA designates how patient health information must be treated in relation to any electronic transmission of patient data, including data recorded within electronic medical/health record platforms (EHRs).

For purposes of clarification, an electronic health record platform includes digital documentation of an individual's medical history and treatment, and is maintained by health professionals and health care institutions. An academic electronic health record platform is a system developed to train future healthcare professionals in documentation of patient care; academic EHRs may include both simulated and actual patient data.

Lippincott's DocuCare is an academic electronic health record platform for nursing students and instructors. DocuCare allows students to chart patient care; this includes complete assessments, vital signs, diagnostic test results, medication orders and administration, intake/output data, and more. Lippincott's DocuCare is used in simulated care settings (with simulators, manikins, and software) as well as clinical settings (with actual patients). Because nursing students can document actual patient care from clinical experiences into DocuCare, we have taken measures to highlight HIPAA's role in protection of patient data within our academic EHR platform.

Specifically, the clinical documentation tools within Lippincott's DocuCare identify the patients' identifying information as designated by HIPAA; confidential patient information is simply designated as "HIPAA-PHI" on the screen for each protected field. Specifically, DocuCare does not display the following patient data: social security number, occupation, employer, insurance, addresses, aliases, admitting and primary care physicians, location of the patient, date of birth (replaced with an auto-generated birthday based on developmental age), and age. Lippincott's DocuCare was built to demonstrate the role of HIPAA in protection of patient privacy.

It is important to note that HIPAA compliance is dependent on the user entering data into any EHR system. Users of Lippincott's DocuCare (students, faculty, and institutional administrators) must be vigilant about adhering to HIPAA while documenting in the system. Lippincott, Williams & Wilkins cannot be responsible for HIPAA compliancy due to the unknown use of the adopting institution. In order to ensure compliance, we strongly recommend that instructors educate students on HIPAA compliance prior to their use of DocuCare in a clinical setting. Students must be constantly aware of HIPAA and careful as they document their clinical data within the system.