

# HIPAA Essentials: The Importance of Patient Privacy

## REVIEW GUIDE

REFERENCE THIS *review guide* TO REFRESH YOUR MEMORY ANY TIME ABOUT THE INFORMATION YOU LEARNED IN THE *HIPAA Essentials* COURSE.

### *What HIPAA Is*

- Ensures protected health information (PHI) is stored securely and only shared when legally permitted, such as for:
  - Treatment
  - Billing insurance
  - Healthcare operations
- In some situations, information covered under HIPAA can be shared without the patient's consent, such as:
  - Medical emergencies
  - Reporting child abuse
  - Notifying public health authorities about communicable diseases
- Patient authorization is required for most other uses

### *Why HIPAA Matters*

- Over 176 million patients in the U.S. have been affected by protected healthcare breaches, most of which resulted from employee negligence and HIPAA noncompliance.
- Health information is deeply personal – everyone has the right to control who sees it!
- When patients know their information is safe, they're more open with their healthcare providers, leading to better care and health outcomes.
- If personal health information gets into the wrong hands, it could lead to identity theft, discrimination, and embarrassment.

### *What HIPAA Covers*

- HIPAA covers everything relating to a patient's treatment, including but not limited to:
  - Demographic information and unique identifiers such as name, phone number, address, date of birth, and social security number
  - Past, present, or future physical and mental health or condition(s)
  - Care received for any past, present, or future condition(s)
  - Notes taken by healthcare providers
  - How they have paid, are paying, or plan to pay for care

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REMEMBER THESE *tips* TO BE SURE YOU'RE COMPLIANT WITH HIPAA:

### *Physical & Digital Security*

- Never leave notes, records, or files unattended for any length of time
- Lock up physical files when not in use
- Log out of computers before stepping away
- Ensure privacy screens are always on computers
- Report lost or stolen devices immediately

### *Communication & Sharing*

- Only use Willow Creek Health Center official email and text accounts for sending messages
- Double-check recipient information before sending messages
- Never discuss patient information in public areas, including while over the phone

### *Access & Ethics*

- Don't share stories about patients, even if you change their name
- Don't access files for patients you aren't treating – curiosity is not a reason!