

## **Committed to HIPAA: the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act**

Advanced Pain Management & Spine Specialists ("APMSS") is committed to upholding the federal regulations and ideals of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act.

It is in the best interest of our valued patients to provide them with the firm assurance that their rights to privacy are guarded to the complete extent of the Law.

It is essential for our patients to feel confident that we respect them and their privacy in order to enhance the healing process. Our staff is trained and regularly audited to ascertain that every APMSS employee understands the importance of HIPAA.

**What is HIPAA?** The "Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act": law enacted by Congress in 1996 to enable privacy of health information and streamline health insurance administration. Privacy Regulations were published by the Secretary of Health and Human Services December 28, 2000. They provide certain protections that "covered entities" (in this case a health care provider), must apply with regard to the use of medical records and identifiable health related information, whether in oral, paper, or in this case, electronic format. The purpose of these protections is to prohibit misuse and unauthorized disclosure of patients' health records and medical information. Stiff penalties for non-compliance applies.

### **What is PHI (Protected health Information)?**

This refers to any information, including demographic information (e.g.- name, social security number, e-mail address, etc), that identifies an individual. It meets any or all of the following:  
information created or received by a health care provider (e.g.- e-mail, paper record, oral communication, etc),  
information relating to past, present, or future physical or mental health condition of an individual,  
information that describes past, present, or future payment for health care of the individual.

### **What makes Information Identifiable?**

This is related to "demographic" information, and includes: names, addresses, employer, relatives names, date birth, phone/fax numbers, e-mail address, social security number, medical record number, or any other characteristic that may identify an individual.

### **What about patient authorization?**

Authorization is required for the release of information for any purpose other than medical management and treatment. The patient cannot be denied treatment, simply because they refuse to authorize release of information. Authorization may be revoked at any time, but the provider cannot be held responsible for information released when the authorization was active. The authorization is typically signed at the first office visit.

### **Why are privacy and confidentiality necessary?**

As health care providers, we are ethically and now legally obliged to protect health related information. HIPAA privacy rules are designed to give patients the right to control who has access to such information.

Communication of this information must remain private and limited to health care providers who need this information to manage diagnostic and treatment endeavors, and administer related healthcare operations (such as payment and insurance issues).

Examples of misuse of healthcare information might include: loss of employment because of potential downtime related to a medical condition, HIV status published in a newspaper, political and financial implications of "discovered" conditions such as a physical and mental impairments, etc.

If you have any questions or complaints, please contact our APMSS Corporate HIPAA Compliance Officer.

