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Regional Health Information Organization

Enforcement of the Information Blocking Rules is Coming (Soon!) –Is Your HIE Ready?

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Disclaimer

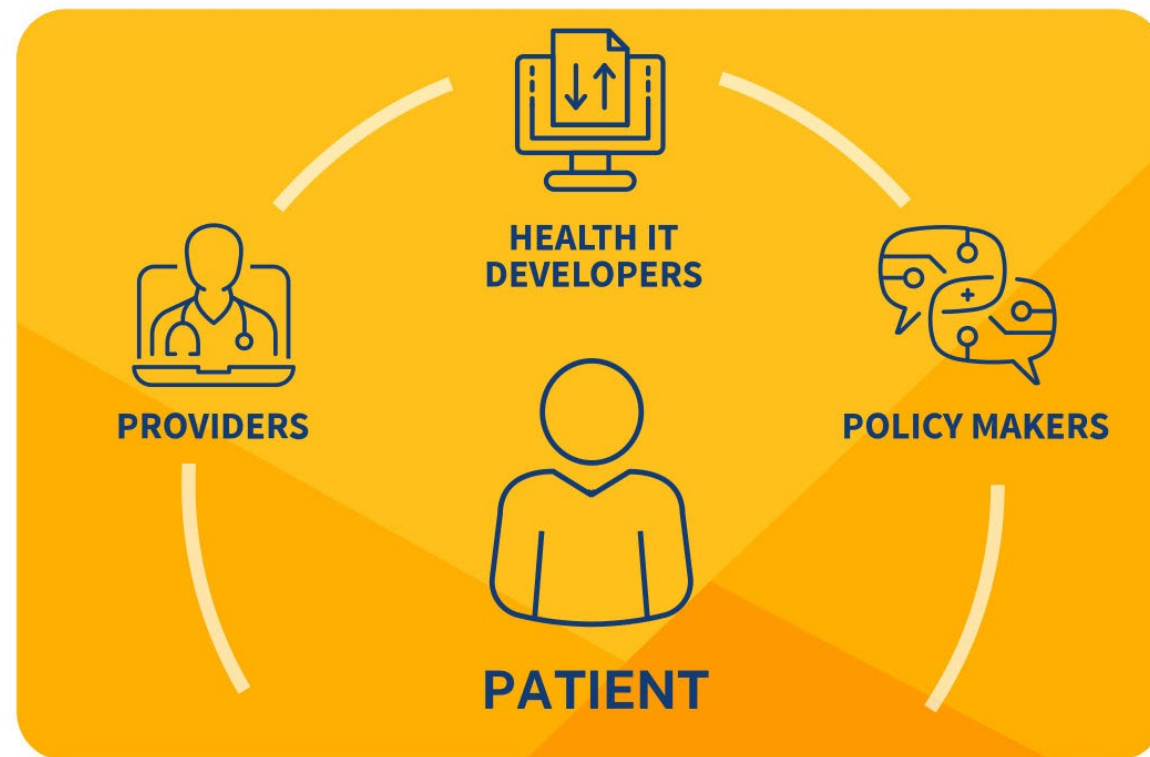
- This material is designed to provide you with educational information about the new information blocking rules.
- The presenters are not providing or offering legal advice but, rather, practical and useful information that could help individuals in the audience work within their institutions and organizations to try to achieve compliance with the information blocking rules.
- Every reasonable effort has been taken to ensure that the educational information provided is accurate and useful.
- Applying best practice solutions and achieving results will vary in each environment.



ONC's Cures Act Final Rule

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- Signed into law on 12-13-2016
- The patient is at the center. Interoperability of electronic health information, including patient access, is a major focus of the 21st Century Cures Act.
- Today's Focus: Prohibitions on “information blocking” and ONC's regulations to implement those prohibitions.



Images source:

<https://www.healthit.gov/curesrule/>

Who Does This Apply To?

Applies to health care providers, certified health information technology vendors (EHR vendors) and health information networks or exchanges (a.k.a. “actors”). (§4004)





What is Information Blocking?

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- Information Blocking: An act or omission that “except as *required* by law or specified by the Secretary [in rulemaking], is likely to interfere with, prevent, or materially discourage access, exchange, or use of electronic health information [EHI].” (§4004)
- Applies to *any* request for information, for *any* purpose.

Intent Matters

- If conducted by a certified health information technology vendor or a health information network or exchange, the entity “**knows or should know**” that the practice is likely to interfere....”
- If conducted by a health care provider, the providers “**knows**” the practice is unreasonable and likely to interfere.....



HIEs/HINs are “Actors” (Covered by the Rules)

- HIEs/HINs: An individual or entity that “determines, controls, or has the discretion to administer any requirement, policy, or agreement that permits, enables, or requires the use of any technology or services for access, exchange, or use of EHI
 - Among more than two unaffiliated individuals or entities (not the HIE) who are enabled to exchange with one another; and
 - Who facilitate exchange for treatment, payment, and operations purposes (terms are defined in HIPAA).
- Once you meet the definition, all of your practices are subject to the information blocking rules [not just those involving the exchange of information for treatment, patient, operations (TPO)].

Definition of Electronic Health Information (EHI)

- EHI Defined: Protected electronic health information (EHI) that meets the HIPAA definition of “designated record set” (i.e., information that patients have the right to access).
- Designated record set is all information in the medical record plus information in other records that is used to make decisions about individuals.



Definition of Electronic Health Information (EHI)

- However, for the first 18 months the information blocking rules are in effect (until 5/1/2022), the definition of “EHI” is limited to the information in the U.S. Core Data Set for Interoperability (USCDI).
- Most USCDI data elements already captured in certified EHRs today, so information blocking policies APPLY to the data that's available in YOUR system today.



Allergies and Intolerances ***NEW**



- Substance (Medication)
- Substance (Drug Class) ***NEW**
- Reaction ***NEW**

Assessment and Plan of Treatment



Care Team Members



Clinical Notes ***NEW**

- Consultation Note
- Discharge Summary Note
- History & Physical
- Imaging Narrative
- Laboratory Report Narrative
- Pathology Report Narrative
- Procedure Note
- Progress Note



Goals



Health Concerns



Immunizations



Laboratory

- Tests
- Values/Results



Medications



Patient Demographics



- First Name
- Last Name
- Previous Name
- Middle Name (incl. middle initial)
- Suffix
- Birth Sex
- Date of Birth
- Race
- Ethnicity
- Preferred Language
- Current Address ***NEW**
- Previous Address ***NEW**
- Phone Number ***NEW**
- Phone Number Type ***NEW**
- Email Address ***NEW**

Problems



Procedures



Provenance ***NEW**



- Author Time Stamp
- Author Organization

Smoking Status



Unique Device Identifier(s) for a Patient's Implantable Device(s)



Vital Signs



- Diastolic Blood Pressure
- Systolic Blood Pressure
- Body Height
- Body Weight
- Heart Rate
- Respiratory Rate
- Body Temperature
- Pulse Oximetry
- Inhaled Oxygen Concentration
- BMI Percentile (2-20 Years) ***NEW**
- Weight-for-length Percentile (Birth - 36 Months) ***NEW**
- Occipital-frontal Head Circumference Percentile (Birth - 36 Months) ***NEW**



For more info:
HealthIT.gov/USCDI

Timeline and penalties

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- Final info blocking rule was published on May 1, 2020
- Note: Vol. 85, No. 85 Federal Register
- **Rule goes into effect Nov. 2, 2020** (six months post publication).
- HHS Office of the Inspector General (OIG) can investigate cases of info blocking and issue penalties of up to \$1 million per violation against EHR vendors and HINs/HIEs.



Examples of Information Blocking

- Practices that restrict access, exchange or use of EHI authorized under applicable state/federal law for treatment and other permitted purposes.
- Implementing health IT in nonstandard ways that are likely to substantially increase the complexity/burden of accessing, exchanging or using EHI.
- Implementing IT in ways likely to restrict access/exchange/use of EHI with respect to exporting complete information sets or facilitating transitions between health IT systems.
- Implementing IT in ways likely to lead to fraud, waste, abuse or impede innovations/advancement in EHI access/exchange or use.



Priority Areas From Rules

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Info blocking “will almost always be implicated” when a practice interferes with access/exchange/use of EHI for these purposes:

- Providing patients with access to their EHI and the ability to exchange and use it without special effort (also charging individuals a fee to electronically access their EHI)
- Ensuring health care professionals, caregivers, and other authorized persons have EHI for treatment and care coordination
- Ensuring payers get information they need to “assess clinical value” and promote transparency of cost and quality of care
- Ensuring providers can get information for quality improvement and population health management activities
- Supporting access/exchange/use for patient safety and public health purposes.

Exceptions to Information Blocking

- The Cures Act authorized HHS to identify “reasonable and necessary activities” that do NOT constitute information blocking.
- Final Rule outlines 8 exceptions (like “safe harbors”)
- Must satisfy all of the relevant conditions of each exception at all relevant times
- What if you don’t meet an exception?
 - No guaranteed protection against penalties.
 - Each situation is evaluated on a case-by-case basis to see if “interference” truly occurred and if the behavior met the intent standard.



Information Blocking Exceptions

- Two Categories:
 - Group A: Exceptions involving **NOT** fulfilling requests of EHI
 - Group B: Exceptions involving procedures **for** fulfilling requests of EHI
- Each exception comes with conditions that must be met





A. Exceptions for NOT Fulfilling Requests

1. **Preventing Harm:** Reasonably necessary practices to prevent harm to a patient or another person.
2. **Privacy:** Refusing to fulfill a request to protect a person's privacy.
3. **Security:** Can interfere with the access/exchange/use of EHI to protect the security of EHI.
4. **Infeasibility:** Does not fulfill a request to access/exchange/use EHI due to the infeasibility of the request.
5. **Health IT Performance:** Reasonable, necessary measures to make health IT temporarily unavailable or degrade overall performance of health IT.

Example: If an app is "hammering the database" or "disrupting others, it's okay to deny access," says Nick Hatt. "It's also okay to take scheduled downtimes."

B. Exceptions: Procedures FOR Fulfilling Requests

1. **Content & Manner:** Limiting content, manner in which an actor fulfills requests.
2. **Fees Exception:** Reasonable fees (including those that generate a reasonable profit),

BUT:

Cannot charge fees “based in any part on electronic access by an individual, their personal representative, or an entity designated by that individual to access the individual’s EHI.”

3. **Licensing Exception:** Actors may license interoperability elements for EHI to be accessed/exchanged/used.



Use Case: Individual Access via HIEs

- Individual (or an app or service engaged by an individual) approaches an HIE to obtain EHI held by or accessible via the HIE.
- How do you respond?
 - Most HIEs today are not exchanging data directly with patients or using patient-facing apps.
- Possible responses:
 - Fulfill request in the manner requested.
 - Fulfill request in an alternative manner (See next slide).
 - Don't fill request – Is there an exception that applies?





Fulfilling Request: “Alternative Manner”

- Ordinarily, a request must be fulfilled “in the manner requested” unless “technically unable” or “cannot reach agreeable terms” with requestor.
- If fulfilling in an alternative manner, must fulfill request “without unnecessary delay” in the following order of priority:
 - Using certified EHR technology;
 - Using content and transport standards specified by the requestor and published by the Federal Government or an ANSI-accredited standards developing organization;
 - Using an alternative machine-readable format, including the means to interpret the EHI, agreed upon with the requestor.
- If fulfilling in an alternative manner, must meet fee requirements (in this case, fees for electronic access by or on behalf of individuals are not permitted).
- If licensing of interoperability elements is involved, must meet licensure exception.

Declining a Request: Any Exceptions?

Common Reasons Why HIEs Might Decline

- Current HIE policies limit access to treatment purposes only and/or contracts (e.g., BAAs) limit purposes for exchange or preclude providing data directly to patients. Does this fit the infeasibility exception?
- Can't identity proof the individual—or unsatisfied with the apps' processes for identity proofing. Does this fit the privacy exception?
- Insufficient consent per state law. Does this fit the privacy exception?
- *Harm exception is not likely here unless a request meets the conditions for denial of right of access request under HIPAA. Note: Risk must be of significant physical harm.*





Infeasibility Exceptions

Designed to address “legitimate practical challenges”

- If claiming infeasibility, must respond within **10 business days** of receipt of the request as to why the request is infeasible (with a detailed written explanation).
- Conditions:
 - **Uncontrollable events:** Actor cannot fulfill the request due to a public health emergency, for example.
 - **Segmentation:** Actor cannot fulfill request because cannot unambiguously segment the requested EHI data from EHI that cannot be made available by law (or due to individual choice)



Infeasibility Exceptions

- Conditions, continued:
 - **Infeasible under the circumstances:** The actor demonstrates, prior to responding to the request, in writing, the following factors that led to its infeasibility determination:
 - A. The type of EHI and the purposes for which it may be needed;
 - B. The cost to the actor of complying in the manner requested;
 - C. The financial and technical resources available to the actor;
 - D. Whether the actor's practice is nondiscriminatory, and the actor provides the same access/exchange/use to its companies, suppliers, partners, and other persons with whom it has a business relationship;
 - E. Whether the actor has control over the network through which EHI is exchanged; and
 - F. Why the actor was unable to provide access/exchange/use by negotiating an alternative means.

Not an Infeasibility Exception

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Not permitted to be considered as an exception: whether the manner requested facilitates competition, or if would have prevented the actor from charging a fee.





Additional Guidance: “Preamble” Language

- Actors “cannot use current policies as a pretext for information blocking. We do not agree that health information exchanges or networks should be given a blanket exemption based on their existing written governance policies because that could lead to a situation involving information blocking if those policies imposed conditions that conflict with the information blocking provision.”
- “If a [HIN/HIE] was exchanging EHI on behalf of a health care provider for treatment purposes but denied an individual access to their EHI available in the [HIE/HIN], then the [HIE/HIN] would be considered [an HIE/HIN] under the circumstances for purposes of information blocking.”



Additional Guidance: “Preamble” Language (2)

- “If an actor is permitted to provide [access/exchange/use] of EHI under the HIPAA Privacy Rule (or other law), then the information blocking provision would require that the actor provide that [access/exchange/use] so long as the actor is not prohibited by law from doing so (assuming no exception is available to the actor).”
- Re: BAAs: “While the information blocking rule does not require actors to violate these agreements, a BAA or its associated service level agreements must not be used in a discriminatory manner by an actor to forbid or limit disclosures that otherwise would be permitted by the Privacy Rule.”
- “To be clear, both the health care provider(s) who initiated the BAA and the BA who may be an actor...would be subject to the information blocking provision[s]....”

Privacy Exception

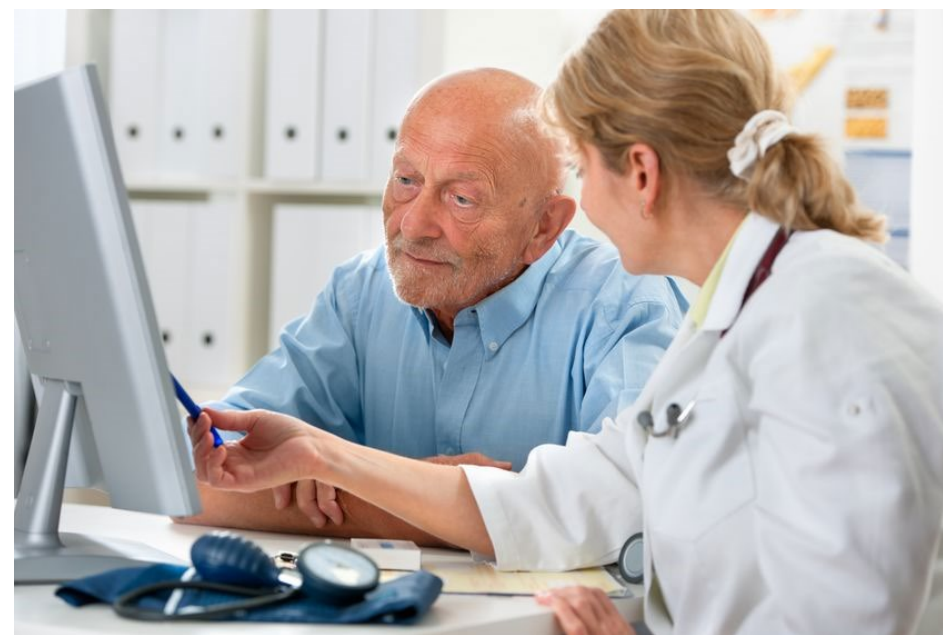
Must meet all of the requirements of at least one of these subsections:

- If precondition not satisfied (if state/federal law requires consent, for example). Of note: if consent provided but doesn't mean all legal requirements, must help an individual to submit a consent that complies with law and can't improperly encourage individual to withhold consent.
- If violates privacy policy of certified Health IT Developer not covered by HIPAA
- Can deny an individual's request based on a reason for denying an individual's right of access request under HIPAA.
- If respecting an individual's request not to share information.



Additional Guidance: “Preamble” Language (3)

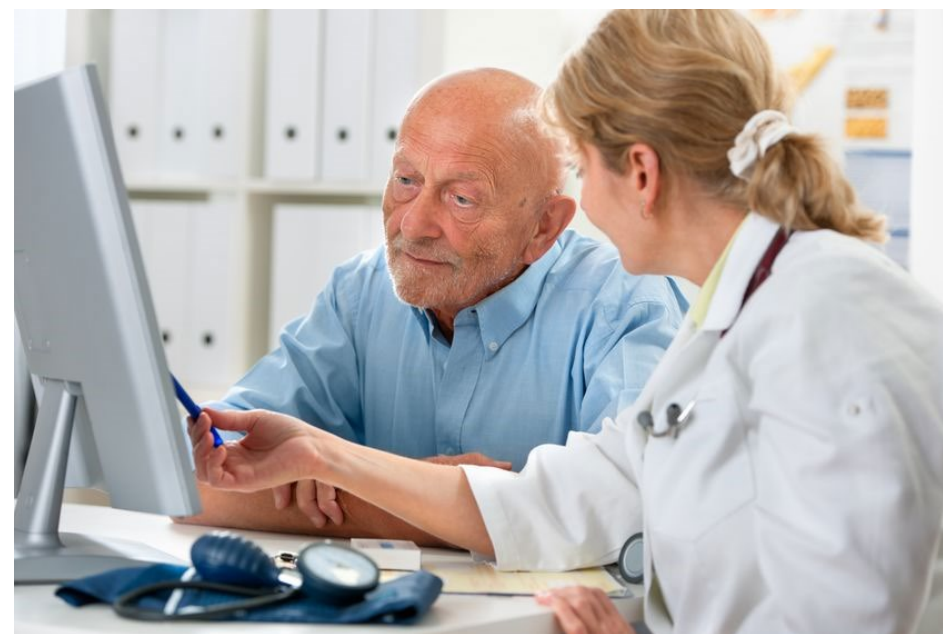
“The final rule supports an individual’s ability to choose which third party developer and app are best for receiving all or part of their EHI.... [T]he final rule also supports and strongly encourages providing individuals with information that will assist them in making the best choices for themselves in selecting a third-party application.”



Additional Guidance: “Preamble” Language (4)

“If an actor chooses not to provide [access/exchange/use] of EHI on the basis that the actor’s identity verification requirements have not been satisfied, the actor’s practice must be tailored to the specific privacy risk at issue.....

[T]his would require that the actor ensure that it does not impose identity verification requirements that are unreasonably onerous under the circumstances.”





Security Exception

Must meet conditions (a), (b), and (c) and one of either (d) or (e).

- (a) The practice must be directly related to safeguarding the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of EHI;
- (b) The practice must be tailored to the specific risk being addressed; and
- (c) The practice must be implemented in a consistent and nondiscriminatory manner; AND
- (d) If the practice implements an organizational policy, the policy must be in writing, directly respond to the security risk, align with consensus-based standards or best practice guidance, provide objective timeframes and other parameters for responding to & addressing security incidents – OR
- (e) If actor is making a case-by-case determination, actor must make determination that:
 - i. The practice is necessary to mitigate risk to EHI,
 - ii. There are no reasonable alternatives to address the risk that are less likely to interfere with the access/exchange/use of EHI.

Other Use Cases

- HIEs/HINs should develop policies for how to handle requests from a range of entities for a range of purposes: public health, research, business intelligence.
- Will need to undertake a similar inquiry for these requests
 - Fulfill in the manner requested
 - Fulfill in an alternate manner
 - Do not fulfill; determine if exception applies (and if not, documenting rationale for why not)
- Be prepared! Develop policies and procedures for anticipated use cases.



Questions??

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