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CMU MAKES CHANGES TO MEET NEW REGULATIONS ON HEALTH INFORMATION

MOUNT PLEASANT — New federal regulations governing the electronic transfer of health information and the privacy and security of protected health information will affect many departments at Central Michigan University.

“Not all health care providers are covered under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1966,” said Chris Tellner, CMU’s coordinator of the task force on HIPAA compliance. “While CMU is not primarily a health care organization, the university still has to make sure any covered areas are compliant. We have a couple of departments that bill electronically that will be impacted by these rules. Larger areas of the university are impacted by the privacy and security rules.”

“There’s no need to panic, but universities need to do this,” said Dennis McMichael, manager of quality assurance in CMU’s information technology office. “The rules governing electronic transactions are effective in Michigan in October 2002 and nationally a year later. Privacy and security standards are effective April 14, 2003.”

CMU recently received an extension until October 2003 for the electronic health care transactions and code sets standards. While CMU may be compliant by the original date this fall, many of the university’s software vendors and third-party administrators will not be, said Tellner.

Tellner was hired part-time in June to coordinate all campuswide efforts and plan employee training programs. The HIPAA also specifies that a privacy officer and a security officer need to be designated at covered institutions. University counsel Eileen Jennings is designated as CMU’s compliance officer who oversees all activities of the HIPAA task force.

“It is extremely difficult for the members of the HIPAA task force to spend the needed hours on this while also functioning in their full-time roles,” said Tellner. “My position will coordinate efforts campuswide.”

Tellner is developing a chart to identify protected health information and how it flows in and out of departments. He also is establishing a CMU-specific glossary of HIPAA terms to help define who and what the statute affects. Health services and the communication disorders department are impacted by rules governing electronic transactions. Departments that receive and give out health information are going to be impacted by privacy and security regulations.

“The largest undertaking that I’m currently working on is the campuswide business plan for the privacy standards of HIPAA,” said Tellner, a CMU graduate with a master’s degree in health care administration. “The plan breaks down the four sections of HIPAA — privacy, security, electronic transactions and unique identifiers — line by line and department by department.”

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The new regulations are expected to save CMU money and be more effective.

“All electronic transactions will be standardized and save us a lot of money in the long run. Right now, it will cost more to implement the changes,” said McMichael. “The indications are that CMU is in very good shape. There are still some privacy issues, but the areas conducting electronic transactions are on schedule.”

On July 23, CMU offered a workshop for CMU personnel and representatives from Grand Valley State University, Ferris State University, Western Michigan University and Oakland University.

“CMU did the training because some people feel we are further ahead in planning than most of our sister universities, at least in Michigan,” said McMichael.

In addition to Jennings, McMichael and Tellner, other members of the task force include:

- Mike Roethlisberger, interim director, internal audit;
- Mary Reetz, human resources systems analyst, SAP project team;
- Etta MacDonagh-Dumler, director of compensation and benefits, human resources;
- Janice Trionfi, director, risk management and insurance;
- Robert Martin, director, faculty personnel services;
- Sarah Campbell, director, university health services;
- Tammy Griffin, manager of health and wellness, human resources;
- Mark Cwiek, faculty, School of Health Sciences;
- Linda Seestedt-Stanford, acting dean, The Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow College of Health Professions; and
- Pat Housley, associate director of news services, public relations and marketing.

Noncompliance with new federal regulations could result in annual fines of \$100 to \$25,000 per incident, according to the statute. Intentional release of information, such as selling patient lists, carries a prison penalty.