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GOVERNMENT PRIVACY REGULATIONS MEAN CHANGES FOR CMU DEPARTMENTS

MOUNT PLEASANT — Protecting private health information will be more difficult and affect more areas of the campus than other regulations of the federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, according to Chris Tellner, Central Michigan University's compliance coordinator.

“Many departments are unaware of the impact of these federal rules, the complexity of the rules, the need to make changes and the penalties involved,” said Tellner. “Every time we talk about HIPAA, people get glazed looks in their eyes.”

HIPAA regulations cover three basic areas about health services and information: electronic transactions, privacy of protected health information and security. CMU already has made changes in electronic billing, installed some security measures, and is developing business agreements and internal standardized forms for release of information.

The government defines protected health information as any written, electronic or oral communication of individually identifiable health information that concerns past, present or future physical or mental conditions of the individual. Under HIPAA, CMU faculty and staff have to be specially trained, and group programs are being developed and online programs will be offered in the future, said Tellner.

Privacy rules will affect health services, audiology and speech pathology, university health plans, faculty personnel, accounts receivable and payable, internal audit, general counsel, computer services, and human resources. In addition, some CMU business associates also will have to make changes to meet HIPAA regulations, or CMU may not be able to do business with them, said Tellner.

The HIPAA task force and subcommittees also are:

- directing interested parties to a reliable HIPAA Web site: www.hipaaadvisory.com,
- dispensing information through media and internal communications, and
- developing a HIPAA awareness-training program.

Wrongful disclosure of protected health information is a criminal offense. Civil penalties are from \$100 to \$25,000 a year per incident, and in criminal cases can mean imprisonment. For more information, contact Tellner at 774-3971 or by e-mail: telln1cj@cmich.edu.