

HIPAA Deadlines Looming

Failure to Comply May Bring Criminal Penalties

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Social workers considered "covered entities" under Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) privacy regulations must be in compliance by April 14, 2003, or risk facing financial penalties or

criminal charges.

Understanding what HIPAA requires may not be simple, but it is important. And with the April privacy deadline fast approaching, social workers need to educate themselves now about what they must do to ensure they are complying with the regulations.

"The worst approach is to panic and do nothing," said NASW Legal Defense Fund Associate Counsel Sherri Morgan. "Social workers should be aware and proactive."

HIPAA was passed in 1996 to help reform the health care industry. Among other changes in the health care system, HIPAA included "administrative simplification" provisions, designed to reduce costs and simplify the management of health information.

Under the administrative simplification provisions, two final sets of regulations are important for social workers: Electronic Transaction Standards and Code Sets, and Standards for Privacy of Individually Identifiable Health Information.

Code set standards affect the way clinical social workers

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Compliance Dates

April 14, 2003

Deadline for compliance with privacy requirements

April 16, 2003

All covered entities must have started software and systems testing to comply with Electronic Transaction Standards and Code Sets

Oct. 16, 2003

Deadline for complying with the electronic transaction and code set standards requirements for those who requested an extension