



## HIPAA: Dollars and Sense

As hospital systems, managed care organizations and other covered entities concentrate on HIPAA regulatory compliance; health care executives are also looking for ways to limit their exposure and reduce their costs.

***“The more you know and the more you embrace HIPAA, the less it will cost your organization.”*** Take time to learn and understand the real issues behind HIPAA. The lack of a clear understanding about HIPAA will push up your HIPAA execution costs. Few organizations use HIPAA as a driver for other business initiatives. More often, only isolated policies, and “quick fix” security implementations are considered. If managed properly, there are substantial economies of scale that can be realized while becoming HIPAA compliant.

***“Human behavior, policy, and technology”*** Human behavior drives policy and policy drives technology- not the other way around. You need to have a solid awareness of your organization’s culture and behavior. If your HIPAA privacy official does not have a thorough understanding and knowledge of your organization’s policies and procedures, your entity will risk non-compliance. Similarly, if your HIPAA privacy official likes “bleeding edge” technology, you will end up spending too much money.

***“Do you know what you have?”*** Make a gut check and take complete inventory of all critical assets-including people and technology. In many cases; your organization may already have the technology necessary to meet the majority of HIPAA requirements. However, your staff may not fully understand HIPAA or have the specific knowledge to activate certain hardware or software “feature sets” that could help achieve compliance at little or no cost.

***“A solid IT team doesn’t mean solid security”.*** This is the biggest misconception about security. An honest assessment of your IT team and its understanding of HIPAA is critical for a successful “cost-controlled” HIPAA security implementation. Most often, IT staffs view security as independent islands of firewalls, proxy servers and virus updates. In many cases, IT departments have a limited understanding of both organizational work flow and Protected Health Information (PHI) flow between internal business units and business associates. In the end, HIPAA provides the framework to tie together as a whole, the secure flow of information.

***“Welcome outside help”*** You are in the business of Health Care, not technology or writing policy. Use help from consultants, attorneys, and others appropriately. These resources can help you digest, interpret, and ultimately corroborate your HIPAA initiative. The use of HIPAA Subject Matter Experts is more cost effective than training a team of internal staff members to do the job.

***“Use HIPAA to plan and build other initiatives”*** What do you want to accomplish for your organization? HIPAA should work in parallel with your organization’s future e-commerce and business initiatives; your HIPAA initiatives should also bring ROI to your organization by increasing the efficiency of your staff, processes and technology.