Policy Statement

It is the policy of Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso (TTUHSC El Paso) to ensure confidentiality of protected health information (PHI) released by email. This policy defines the minimum guidelines and procedures that individuals must follow when transmitting patient information via email. Unless otherwise allowed by federal or state law, TTUHSC El Paso shall only email PHI as outlined in this policy.

Scope

This policy applies to all PHI maintained by TTUHSC El Paso.

Policy

PHI is allowed in internal messages without encryption, i.e., the email must go to another ttuhsc.edu email address.

Transmission of PHI to external parties i.e., any email address other than ttuhsc.edu must be manually encrypted. This includes emails to patients, providers, hospitals, payors, etc.

How to encrypt email: Type [send secure] or [ss] in the subject line right before the subject of the email, as shown below.

Transmission of PHI through EMR secure message center- After logging into Message Center users are able to send secure messages. The following steps are to send a secure message using message center. This is the preferred method to send PHI.

1. Click on the New Message on the left side of the application.
You will notice 3 options appear. Use the most appropriate to your needs

- **New Message** to the patient will require a patient search before composing the email. Pull the patient email address from their registry if it exists and put it as the **recipient** by default. Document from the patient chart can be attached and sent if checked from the EMR chart.

- **New Referral Message**: This will require a patient search before composing the email and also allow you to attach anything from a patient chart. Any document from the patient chart can be attached and sent if checked from the EMR.

- **New Standard Message**: Go straight to composing an email where anything can be written about a patient.
Once you find the patient, use the EMR chart Tab, so whatever document needed to be attached can be selected from there.

To attach documents from the chart just checkmark the corresponding boxes.

To continue sending messages, go to the Message tab and compose your message.

1. Click on the link inside the received confirmation e-mail to open the original message.
2. Log into the Message Center web application using a Secure messaging account or click on the Messaging tab if using Centricity EMR.
3. Click on the new Unread e-mail to review it.
4. Click on the Reply or Reply All button.

If a patient requests in writing their PHI be sent unencrypted, TTUHSC El Paso will advise the patient of the risks involved with sending PHI unencrypted. However, if the patient insists, TTUHSC El Paso will comply documenting the patient’s request in his/her record.

Knowledge of a violation or potential violation of this policy must be reported directly to the institutional privacy officer or the Fraud and Misconduct Hotline at (866) 294-9352 or www.ethicspoint.com under Texas Tech University System.

**Frequency of Review**

This policy will be reviewed on each even-numbered (ENY) by the Institutional Privacy Officer, and the HIPAA Privacy and Security Committee, but may be amended or terminated at any time.

Questions regarding this policy may be addressed to the Institutional Privacy Officer or the Institutional Compliance Officer.

**Review Date:** January 3, 2022

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