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Proactive elements drive effective compliance programs

By Nick Culbertson

Privacy and compliance professionals are on the "front lines" of patient care, and there's no doubt compliance has a huge impact. It's there to ensure all the myriad rules and regulations in healthcare are being followed, as that helps guarantee the quality and safety of patient care. It's why American hospitals and health systems pay $39 billion per year to check the box that they're complying with ever-changing policies around securing and maintaining healthcare data and working with controlled substances.[1] That's a very costly intervention, and most of that spending is focused on manual tasks and audits done by highly skilled privacy and compliance individuals.

Today, many healthcare organizations still rely on a more reactive approach to staying compliant. While reactive elements are certainly necessary for an effective compliance program, the proactive elements comprise a preventive approach that drives the success of your efforts and helps create a culture of compliance.

Reactive elements

Reactive activities are important for creating a picture of what has happened compliance-wise at your organization. However, they only pertain to past events, so there's no opportunity to address and correct issues in real-time.

Audits

Evaluating existing compliance programs through internal audits is a necessary process and provides rich context for identifying areas of improvement. Formal external audits by independent third parties who report on whether your organization is compliant can spur corrective action plans that result in new controls or safeguards to better protect your organization, patients, and workforce.

Investigations

Investigating potential violations helps your team learn the full extent of the possible impact. A thorough, timely, discreet, objective, and consistent investigation process can determine when the potential violation occurred. It will also reveal how many and which patients and employees could have been affected, and the level of risk to which your organization could have been exposed. Investigators must move quickly and understand complicated data from disparate systems to create a narrative.

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