

COMPLIANCE CONNECTION

Privacy Reminder: Safeguarding the Privacy of Patient Information during the Covid-19 National Emergency

SPECIAL EDITION



There is no
medicine like
hope, no incentive
so great, and no
tonic so powerful
as the expectation
of something
tomorrow.
Orison Swett Marden

The Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) is committed to keeping our clients first in everything we do – including safeguarding the privacy and security of their confidential health information. With the current national emergency and managing COVID-19 (Coronavirus), DMHAS continues to actively seek ways to continue to serve and support our clients while adhering to recommended safe practices. In some cases that may include implementation of telephonic services.

We want to take this opportunity to remind staff of their responsibility to only access patient health information (PHI) that is required for carrying out assigned job duties. As we continue to adjust and prepare to care for our clients in this somewhat new and unprecedented landscape, please remember the following basic privacy and security guidelines for safeguarding patient information – whether on-site or working from home:



- Access only the PHI that you need to meet your assigned job responsibilities.
- Be aware that routine access audits may be carried out to identify any unauthorized access, use, or disclosure of patient health information; follow up action will be taken for violation of policy (and HIPAA privacy and confidentiality requirements).
- Remember that verbal patient information is confidential too. Do not discuss the status of patients unless the discussions are necessary to carry out patient care.
- If you are working from home or sharing space with others outside of DMHAS, think about who may overhear your conversations and ensure that you are keeping the client's PHI private and confidential.
- Ensure the client has given verbal consent for telephonic services and document such consent in the medical record.
- Do not leave your computer screen in view of anyone outside of DMHAS workforce
- Remember that electronic services are only permitted with DMHAS/BEST endorsed applications; ZOOM is not permitted.

Thank you for your commitment to putting our patients first in everything we do and ensuring that their confidential health information remains secure.

For additional information please see DMHAS COVID-19 Staff Update #5 regarding guidance documents when working from home.