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OCR Announces Notification of Enforcement Discretion for Telehealth Remote Communications During the COVID-19 Nationwide Public Health Emergency

Today, the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) at the U.S Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced, effective immediately, that it will exercise its enforcement discretion and will waive potential penalties for HIPAA violations against health care providers that serve patients through everyday communications technologies during the COVID-19 nationwide public health emergency.

This exercise of discretion applies to widely available communications apps, such as FaceTime or Skype, when used in good faith for any telehealth treatment or diagnostic purpose, regardless of whether the telehealth service is directly related to COVID-19.

In support of this action, OCR will be providing further guidance explaining how covered health care providers can use remote video communication products and offer telehealth to patients responsibly.

"We are empowering medical providers to serve patients wherever they are during this national public health emergency," said Roger Severino, OCR Director. "We are especially concerned about reaching those most at risk, including older persons and persons with disabilities," Severino added.

The Notification of Enforcement Discretion on telehealth remote communications may be found at: <https://www.hhs.gov/hipaa/for-professionals/special-topics/emergency-preparedness/notification-enforcement-discretion-telehealth/index.html>.

For more information on HIPAA and COVID-19, see OCR's February 2020 Bulletin: <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/february-2020-hipaa-and-novel-coronavirus.pdf> - PDF

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