



# Health IT Safety

## Risky Workarounds

### *Did you know?*

Survey respondents reported that 51% of the time they use HIT workarounds either sometimes or every day, including the use of personal devices\* / apps for communicating patient information.

\*Personal devices include smartphones, tablets, laptops, and notebooks.

#### **The problem?**

In order to facilitate rapid communication of the progress of a wound, the bedside nurse took a picture of the wound with her personal cell phone and texted it to the physician. The hospital had no guidelines in place for the use of personal cell phones for communicating patient information, but seemed unconcerned as long as there was no information that specifically identified the patient. Unfortunately, neither the picture of the wound, nor the communication about it was documented in the patient's medical record.

***This is not an uncommon scenario.*** Health care workers report that the leading reasons why they use these workarounds instead of the approved processes are that they are easier and that their IT department has been too slow to enable new technologies. These same professionals reported that they felt these workarounds were necessary for them to deliver efficient and effective care to their patients. However, most do not understand the unintended consequences of jeopardizing the integrity of documentation and communication of patient care that can lead to error and patient harm. Protected health information (PHI) is at risk if it is transmitted in unencrypted form. Using alternative routes of communication can lead to an error if information is not appropriately documented in the patient's medical record and available to everyone involved in the patient's care.

### **Curbing workaround usage**

1. Provide staff with encrypted devices to use so that they are not reliant on the use of personal communication devices.
2. Develop hospital policy and guidelines regarding the use of personal devices to communicate patient information.
3. Educate staff about the unintended consequences of this risky workaround behavior.
4. Ensure that your IT department is agile and responsive in evaluating, securing and enabling timely use of new technologies by frontline healthcare staff to improve care.

Source: "Workarounds in Healthcare, a Risk Trend." Produced by HIMSS media. <http://www.intel.com/content/dam/www/public/us/en/documents/reports/workarounds-in-healthcare-risky-trend.pdf>

**If you've seen an error or adverse event related to Health IT, report it through your incident reporting system so that we can improve the quality of health care delivery and eliminate preventable harm.**

