

Quick guide to HIPAA-compliant communication between healthcare providers



Introduction

In the medical field, collaborative communications are critical. Care coordination team members must work together closely and share information with one another to ensure positive patient outcomes. At the same time, they must also abide by HIPAA regulations.

This guide explores how healthcare providers can ensure HIPAA-compliant collaborative communication within care teams.

What is collaborative communication?

“[Collaborative communication](#)” comes from the business world. It refers to a way of communicating while working together. The most important part of the phrase is “communication.” Collaborative communication only succeeds if everyone involved shares accurate information in a timely fashion. Parties discuss information openly so that everyone is on the same proverbial page.

Why collaborative communication matters in the field of healthcare

In the field of healthcare, collaborative communication is critical. Today, patients receive treatment from multiple providers. If those providers don’t work together, patients could suffer the consequences.

Research bears this out: the most common oncology-related medical errors were directly related to a lack of communication between providers and facilities. The Journal of Oncology Practice reported that [over 50% of all adverse events](#) reported were due to a lack of coordination between the provider and the healthcare facility.

A lack of coordinated care hurts healthcare organizations, too. According to the American Journal of Managed Care, insufficient care coordination raises the cost of chronic disease management by [over \\$4,500 over the course of three years](#).

HIPAA and collaborative communications

HIPAA rules are designed to protect patients' confidential information. They enable safe collaborative communication between providers.

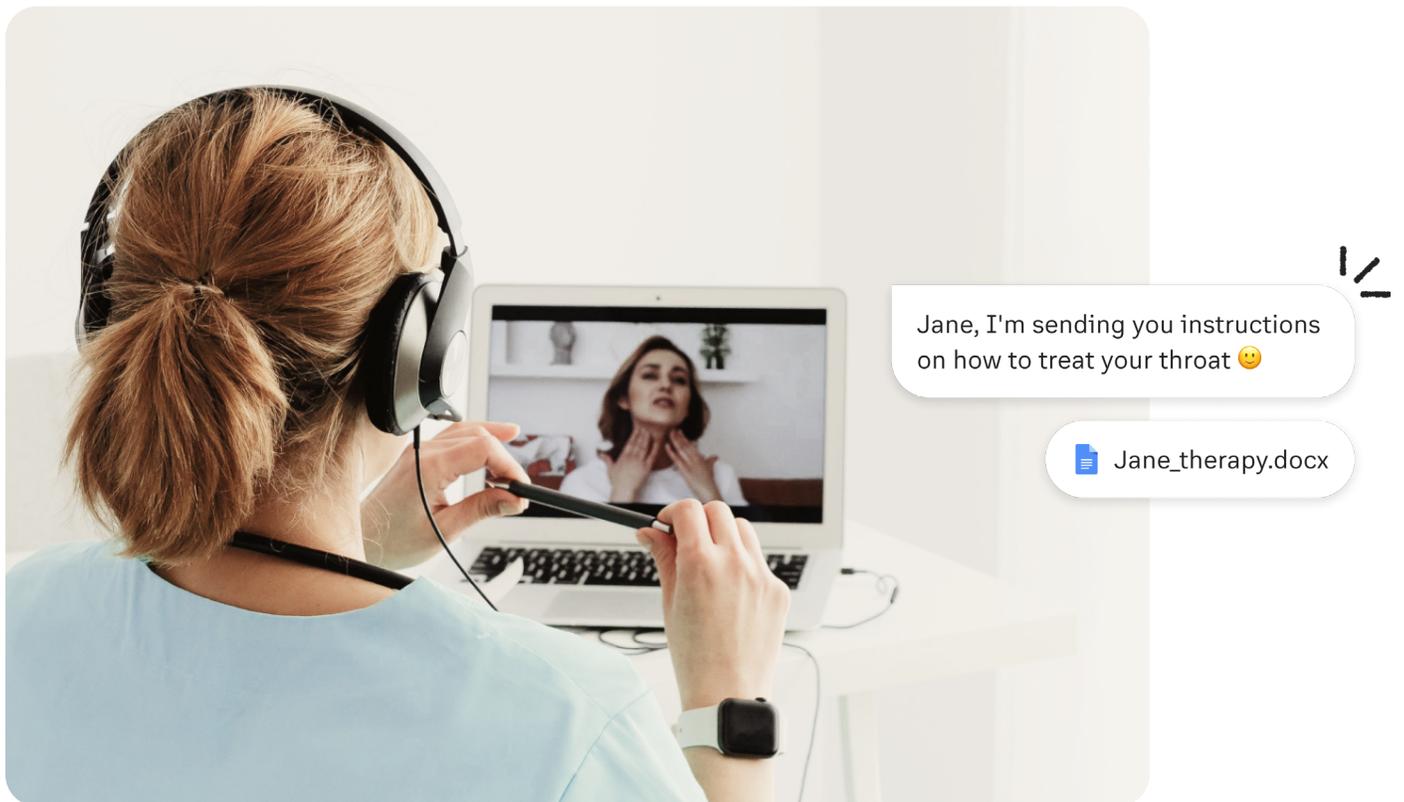
Under [HIPAA's privacy rule](#), any pertinent clinical care information can be disclosed between a patient's current treatment providers. The patient doesn't need to provide written authorization (with the exception of psychotherapy notes).

The [privacy rule](#) covers electronic communications, including text messages, emails, video conferences, and telephone conversations conducted over the Internet. As such, these messages must be protected by measures such as encryption.

What happens if you don't use HIPAA-compliant communication?

If you're communicating with members of a patient's care team through non-compliant channels, you could be subject to heavy fines.

In 2019, the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Civil Rights, which is responsible for HIPAA enforcement, levied fines against ten healthcare organizations for non-compliance. Those fines totaled [over \\$12 million](#).



How can you ensure HIPAA-compliant communications?

HIPAA violations ruin providers' reputation and destroy patient trust. Yet, it can be surprisingly easy to find yourself running afoul of the law.

There are two reasons why it's challenging to maintain HIPAA compliance:

- The law isn't static
- The law doesn't specify a standard for certification

HIPAA isn't static

Since it was first signed into law, [HIPAA has been updated](#) to reflect technological changes as well as shifting societal situations. For example, during the global health crisis in 2020, the US government relaxed HIPAA rules to allow providers to treat patients remotely.

Maintaining HIPAA compliance involves staying up to date on changes in the law. That creates a burden for providers, whose core competency is taking care of patients.

The law doesn't specify a standard for certification

Within HIPAA, there's no standard or implementation specification that would certify an organization as HIPAA-compliant. In fact, HHS doesn't even require proof of HIPAA compliance.

To fill that gap, several third-party organizations have created HIPAA compliance programs. Any organization that claims it is HIPAA-compliant has received certification from a third party, and not from HHS.

How can providers communicate effectively and safely?

With the confusion surrounding HIPAA-compliant communications, how can providers communicate effectively without worrying about violating the law? The answer lies in a cloud communications platform.

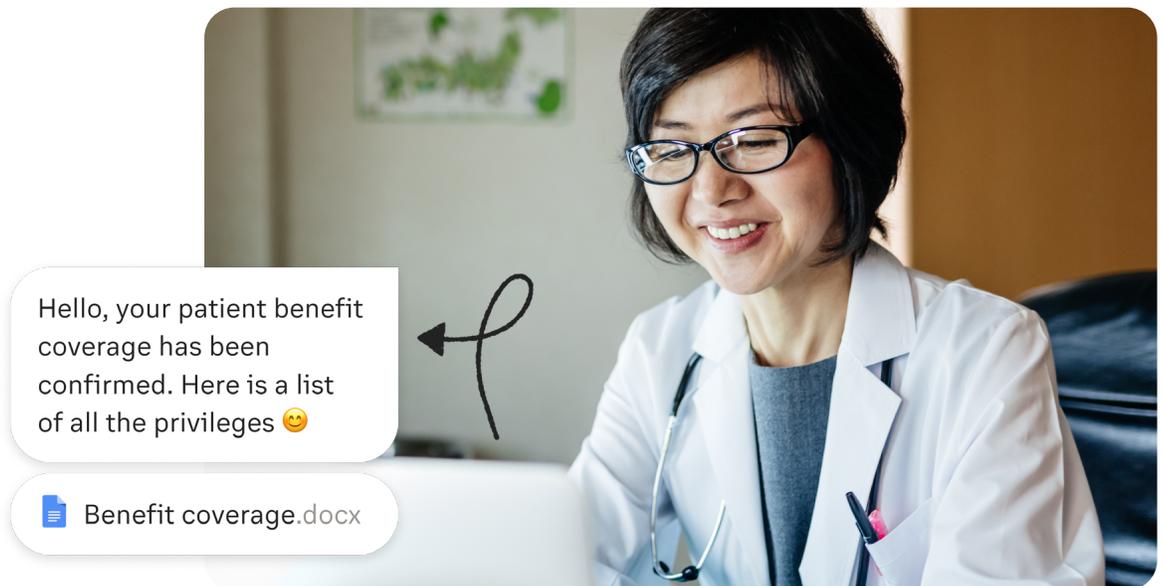
Cloud communications platforms deliver collaboration tools (video, telephony, chat, and file-sharing) in a single solution.

They're also highly secure. Here's a list of their [built-in security features](#):

- Seven layers of security (physical, network, host, data, application, business processes, enterprise organization)
- 24/7 platform monitoring
- 99.9999% uptime guarantee
- Transportation Layer Security and Secure Real-Time Transport Protocol encryption between all endpoints
- Firewalls
- Border session controllers
- Intrusion detection systems
- Fraud analytics
- Monitoring
- System hardening
- Vulnerability scans

Market-leading cloud communications platforms also utilize the highest levels of physical and environmental security. The data centers that run these platforms are protected by the most robust electronic prevention systems, on-site engineering specialists, and security guards. Moreover, geographically diverse data center locations minimize data loss and service interruption.

These security features support HIPAA-compliant communications guidelines, giving providers and patients peace of mind.



Cloud communications platforms support HIPAA-compliant collaborative communications

With a cloud communications platform, providers can collaborate with members of the care team safely and effectively.

We'll illustrate with an example. Jessica is a high-risk pregnancy patient. Her obstetrician works with her primary care physician and an endocrinologist to ensure Jessica has a healthy baby.

When Jessica goes into labor, her obstetrician sends a secure text message to her primary care physician and the endocrinologist to keep them in the loop. The doctor also messages the nurses and anesthesiologists that are on shift during Jessica's delivery, so they're aware of her health issues and don't give her any medications that could harm her or the fetus.

Thanks to safe, collaborative communication, Jessica delivers a healthy baby. When she goes to see her endocrinologist after the birth, the specialist holds a video conference with Jessica's primary care physician to discuss the issues she is having. The endocrinologist sends Jessica for some tests, messaging her primary care physician to inform him of what's happening.

Because Jessica's family doctor knows exactly what medication she's on and what tests she's undergoing, he can prescribe her the right treatment to help with any other issues that come up. Secure collaborative communication ensures a better outcome for Jessica.

About RingCentral

RingCentral's cloud communications platform supports HIPAA-compliant collaborative communications

RingCentral's highly secure collaborative communications platform supports HIPAA compliance regarding collaboration between providers. Providers can share information with other members of a care team so that everyone makes the right treatment decisions.

To learn more [get a demo](#).

Put connection at the center of care

Deliver better patient and member experiences via your healthcare program, and bring down costs with modern and secure cloud communications.

RingCentral is where communication meets innovation. We provide a robust, secure, and global cloud communications platform with messaging, video, and phone. We help healthcare organizations everyday improve collaboration and productivity and ultimately drive better patient outcomes.

For more information, please contact a sales representative. Visit ringcentral.com/office/industry-solutions/healthcare-communications-cloud-phone-systems or call 855-774-2510.

RingCentral, Inc. (NYSE: RNG) is a leading provider of business cloud communications and contact center solutions based on its powerful Message Video Phone™ (MVP®) global platform. More flexible and cost effective than legacy on-premises PBX and video conferencing systems that it replaces, RingCentral empowers modern mobile and distributed workforces to communicate, collaborate, and connect via any mode, any device, and any location. RingCentral offers three key products in its portfolio including RingCentral MVP™, a unified communications as a service (UCaaS) platform including team messaging, video meetings, and a cloud phone system; RingCentral Video®, the company's video meetings solution with team messaging that enables Smart Video Meetings™; and RingCentral cloud Contact Center solutions. RingCentral's open platform integrates with leading third-party business applications and enables customers to easily customize business workflows. RingCentral is headquartered in Belmont, California, and has offices around the world.

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