Eleven costly mistakes providers have made when dealing with confidential patient information.
A few years ago, a medical center employee found herself in hot water after sending a Tweet to the then governor of Mississippi. The governor had tweeted: "Glad the Legislature recognizes our dire fiscal situation. Look forward to hearing their ideas on how to trim expenses." The employee then tweeted to the governor: "Schedule regular medical exams like everyone else instead of paying ... employees overtime to do it when clinics are usually closed," according to WLBT 3, a Fox affiliate in Jackson, Miss. Hospital officials stated that the employee had violated privacy laws and the employee resigned, according to the news outlet.
2. Copy confusion.

Keep in mind that your copiers may store information electronically. A health plan paid $1.2 million to settle potential violations of HIPAA after it disclosed the protected health information (PHI) of up to 344,579 patients, according to HHS. The potential disclosure occurred when the health plan returned multiple photocopiers to a leasing agent without erasing the data contained on the hard drives.
3. Public PHI.

A physician practice agreed to pay HHS a $100,000 settlement after it posted patients' clinical and surgical appointments on a publicly accessible, Internet-based calendar. The investigation into the practice also found that it failed to document staff training on security policies and procedures, conduct a risk analysis, and obtain appropriate business associate agreements.
4. Number misstep.

Double-check, and check again, when faxing. A doctor's office disclosed a patient's HIV status when the office mistakenly faxed medical records to the patient's place of employment instead of the patient's new healthcare provider, according to HHS. The practice employee responsible for the disclosure received a written disciplinary warning, and both the employee and the physician apologized to the patient. HHS' Office for Civil Rights (OCR) also required the practice to revise its fax cover page to underscore a confidential communication for the intended recipient.
5. Unexpected delivery.

While helping a retiring physician transition her patients to new providers, and while considering purchasing some of the physician's practice, one health system took custody of approximately 5,000 patient medical records, according to HHS. Later, employees of the health system left 71 cardboard boxes containing these medical records on the driveway of the physician's home unattended. As penalty, the health system had to pay HHS $800,000 and adopt a corrective action plan.

One medical center employee posted a photo of a patient's medical record, name included, on his Facebook page, according to the *Los Angeles Daily News*. The employee then commented, "Funny but this patient came in to cure her VD and get birth control." It gets worse. According to the news outlet, when other Facebook users commented that the employee was violating the patient's privacy, the employee responded, "People, it's just Facebook ... not reality."
7. Missed connection.

Sometimes putting in extra time after hours is a bad idea. One hospital employee who took documents home with her accidentally left the documents on the Boston subway system, according to HHS. The documents, which contained the personal health information of 192 patients, including many with HIV/AIDS, were never recovered. Ultimately, the hospital paid $1 million to settle claims that it violated privacy rules.
8. Shameful sharing.

Employees at one medical center allegedly posted a screenshot of a woman's medical record to a Facebook group called "Team No Hoes." The screenshot showed all of the woman's personal information including her syphilis diagnosis. The woman filed a lawsuit against the medical center and the employees allegedly involved (including a man believed to be her ex-boyfriend), according to WLWT News 5, a Cincinnati NBC affiliate.

Upon receiving notice that his employer planned to dismiss him, a researcher at a large health system read his immediate supervisors' and coworkers' medical records. He also viewed the medical records of celebrities, including Tom Hanks and Leonardo DiCaprio, according to the Journal of AHIMA. The researcher was the first person in the country to be sentenced to federal prison (he received four months) for a misdemeanor HIPAA offence.
10. Media mess.

Senior officials at one medical center shared a patient's information with multiple media outlets without a valid written authorization from the patient, according to HHS. Officials at the medical center also shared details about the patient's medical condition, diagnosis, and treatment in an e-mail sent to their entire workforce. The medical center paid a $275,000 monetary settlement.
11. Obvious error.

A patient complained to OCR after he noticed that his dental practice was flagging some of its medical records by placing a red sticker with the word "AIDS" on the outside cover of the records. Patients and unauthorized staff could easily read the sticker on the files, according to HHS. OCR required the practice to revise its policies and operating procedures and to move medical alert stickers to the inside cover of the records.