ABSTRACT

Compliance with regulatory guidelines and mandates surrounding information security and the protection of privacy has been under close scrutiny for some time throughout the world. Smaller organizations have remained “out of the spotlight” and generally do not hire staff with the expertise to fully address issues of compliance. This case study examines a project partnership between an information-technology (IT) consultant who specializes in small business and a diminutive medical practice that sought support with compliance issues surrounding a research study it was conducting. Other small medical practices were contributing to the research; consequently, information sharing while concurrently adhering to the regulations of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996 was a significant aspect of the project. It was also critical that numerous other security and privacy legislative requirements were met. The issue of data security is often neglected in IT instruction. This case study provides a foundation for examining aspects of information security from the perspective of the small-business IT consultant.

Keywords: HIPAA; Information Privacy; Information Security

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

Stephanie Soule had developed a great passion toward her home state and found her undergraduate internship with several small regional businesses highly rewarding. She surprised her teachers, family, and friends when she turned down job offers from two leading U.S. technology-consulting firms. Stephanie had graduated at the top of her class with an undergraduate degree in information systems. Rather than accept a position with a large corporation, she opted to remain within her hometown of Rumford and open her own technology-consulting firm serving small businesses throughout the greater Portland, Maine region. She named her new company the Rumford Consulting Group (RCG) and established the firm as a subchapter S corporation, registering herself as the sole owner and employee. Arranging a loan from her parents, Stephanie began operating from an apartment above a garage belonging to her parents, which also functioned as her home. The initial goal she set for the RCG was to become...
Stephanie Soule felt well prepared for the task at hand. Her undergraduate degree in information systems had included course work in database management, programming, and systems analysis and design. Her introductory course in the management of information systems had detailed issues of compliance and risk management that specifically addressed the regulatory mandates of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002, the Graham-Leach-Bliley Act of 1999, and HIPAA. However, it would be impossible for such a course to cover all of the legislative requirements that must be addressed in an international research project. Stephanie was prepared for the necessity to “dig” for additional project-specific compliance issues.

**SETTING THE STAGE**

Stephanie learned in an initial phone conversation with the president of the center for endometriosis that all of the investigators participating in the research group own small practices affiliated with local or regional hospitals. Typically, a small medical practice ensures compliance with the HIPAA of 1996 by purchasing medical-office software certified as compliant by the vendor. Such software suites generally provide modules centered on practice management including billing and electronic medical records. Although these software packages are touted as HIPAA compliant, small businesses must still be cognizant of many nontechnical but management-oriented security and privacy issues. Various state; federal; and in this case, international laws and guidelines must be followed that such software will not address.

The data the researchers in this project wished to collect indeed fell beyond the scope of their current software systems. Consequently, the president of the center (i.e., the lead re-
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