Keep confidential information out of text messages

Does your team rely on texts and pages to quickly ask questions of each other or share information? Have you been in a hurry and decided that sending a text would keep you on schedule better than making a phone call? For a growing number of Providence employees, text messaging and text paging have become staples of workplace communication.

Text messages and pages aren't encrypted

If you need to conduct Providence business through texts, it is important to be cautious about how you do so and take steps to prevent a data breach. When using a portable device such as a cell phone, PDA or pager, the safest practice is to store as little sensitive information as possible on the device. Also, do not transmit confidential information (including protected health information and personal identifying information) unless it is an emergency. Instead, send a message asking the person to call you and relay the information over the phone.

If no other alternative exists, and you must include confidential information in a text, follow these guidelines:

- If you need to text confidential information, always follow the “minimum necessary” rule and never text financial information.
- Regularly update text messaging addresses to ensure that only the intended recipients receive text messages. Be careful to direct your message only to people authorized to view the information you’re sending.
- It is important not to store confidential information on your device. If you receive a text with confidential information, promptly delete it from both the in box and the deleted items on your phone, PDA or pager after reading it.
- Do not set your device to automatically forward e-mails to a text-messaging address.
- Immediately report a lost or missing device that contains Providence information to the Technology Operations Center before notifying your service carrier.

Did you know your text messages could be intercepted while they are being transmitted? None of the current security measures used by service providers encrypt text messages.