

LONG TERM CARE & SENIOR LIVING BLOG

Happy HIPAA update: OCR getting new Director

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Based on reports that HHS Secretary Sylvia Mathews Burwell appointed Joceyln Samuels to replace Leon Rodriguez, it appears Office for Civil Rights (OCR) has the new leadership it has been awaiting. With this new leadership at the helm, can HIPAA audits be far off? Probably not.

Ilana Peters, OCR's senior advisor for HIPAA compliance and enforcement was quoted this June at the Health Information Management Systems Society and Healthcare IT News Privacy and Security Forum as stating "We're hopeful that our audits will begin, hopefully the end of this year, early next year." OCR expects to begin with covered entities and follow with business associates likely next year, she said. These audits will include both desk audits, which officials anticipate will number between 150 and 200, and 50 on-site audits. "That number is a bit in flux," she added, a number that depends on the financial resources given to the division.

Why are OCR audits significant? Covered entities and business associates will need to demonstrate compliance with HIPAA/HITECH. Violation of HIPAA is serious business. To date, OCR has levied \$26 million in HIPAA settlements against entities found to have violated HIPAA privacy, security and breach notification rules. Now is the time for healthcare providers to meet with attorneys and ensure they are in compliance with HIPAA/HITECH before the audits begin. Read more about the full story from HealthcareITNews.com.

By Denise Bloch

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