

Misdirected Faxes over IP (FOIP) May Lead To a Privacy Breach

FOIP (short for fax over Internet Protocol) allows a fax to be transmitted via the Internet rather than the traditional method of sending faxes via the telephone line. While it is more efficient than traditional analog faxing, there are still privacy considerations that must be respected.

If you use FOIP to send a fax and send the fax to the wrong location, the personal health information contained in the fax may be inadvertently disclosed to unauthorized individuals. If you send a fax to the correct location, but the fax is picked up by an unauthorized individual, patient's personal health information may also be inappropriately accessed. When sending information using FOIP, employ the following best practices to protect personal health information.

How to minimize privacy breaches using FOIP

- Consider whether sending confidential information via fax is the most appropriate means of communication. For example, sending the information via courier or secure file transfer may be more secure.
- Use a fax cover sheet that contains a privacy and confidentiality notice, identifies the total number of pages being sent, the sender, contact information of the sender, the name of the intended recipient and the recipient's fax number.
- Double check your documents before you send your fax to ensure only the correct information is faxed to the recipient.
- Check the documents you receive by fax to ensure you have all the pages that were sent.
- When possible/practical, call the recipient of the fax prior to sending the fax to notify him or her that a fax is about to be sent.
- If you discover that a fax you have sent containing confidential information has been transmitted to an incorrect location, try to retrieve the fax and/or to ensure that the recipient destroys it by shredding it.
- If you receive a fax in error, contact the sender as soon as possible to confirm whether or not the fax should be returned or destroyed.
- Keep FOIP contact information & fax numbers current.
- When selecting a contact and fax number in a drop down menu double check your selection to ensure you select the right person.
- Review your confirmation log to confirm the accuracy of your transmission.

- When sending personal health information by FOIP, confirm that users of the computer system (at the receiving end) do not have access to the fax without a password.
- Likewise, if you are expecting information by FOIP ensure other users of your system cannot access the information without a password.
- Be aware that your fax number may be reassigned once you have given up your number. Check with your telephone/internet provider about options to retire the number or rent the number for a period of time to ensure all clients have been contacted & have updated your contact information.
- If you relocate or your contact information changes, ensure it is updated with all of your contacts and directories & destroy any pre-printed forms and fax cover sheets and correspondence referring to your previous number.
- Protect access to your workstation and/or laptop using a strong password.
- Lock your computer while not in use by pressing ctrl-alt-delete and shut down your laptop/computer when you are finished using it.
- Do not save or store personal health information on desktops or workstations.
- Mobile computing devices should be encrypted in accordance with IPC orders and referenced standards.
- If you print a facsimile containing personal health information shred the document when no longer required or store in a locked and secure location.
- Do not retain documents containing personal health information longer than necessary to meet the intended purpose for which it was collected.

If you have questions about this fact sheet or to report a privacy fax issue related to a telemedicine event or service, please contact us at privacy@otn.ca.

