What is protected health information (PHI) according to HIPAA?

Anything that can be used to identify the patient, including the following specified identifiers:

- Names
- Addresses (street, city, county, zip code — more than three digits)
- Phone numbers
- Fax numbers
- Email addresses
- Dates (other than year) directly related to an individual
- Social Security numbers
- Medical record numbers
- Health insurance beneficiary numbers
- Account numbers
- Certificate/license numbers
- Vehicle identifiers and serial numbers, including license plate numbers
- Device identifiers and serial numbers
- Web uniform resource locators (URLs)
- Internet protocol (IP) addresses
- Biometric identifiers, including finger, retinal and voice prints
- Full face photogenic images
- Any other unique identifying number, characteristic or code, except the unique code assigned by the investigator to code the data
- Anything about the patient’s past, present or future medical conditions and treatment
- Includes billing and payment records for the treatment of health care services

Even the fact that the patient is receiving treatment is private.

How is patient information shared?

There are several ways patient information can be shared:
- Spoken/orally
- Written/papers
- Electronic/computer
- Visual/eyes

All of these communication types are protected under HIPAA regulations.

For more information about this issue of AFMC HealthIT HIPAAwatch, please visit afmc.org/healthit, email healthit@afmc.org or call 501-212-8616.