

Patients with privacy concerns three times as likely to withhold details from their doctors

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Have you ever kept information from a doctor or other health care provider because you were concerned about the privacy or security of your medical record? If so, new research at The Ohio State University

College of Medicine finds you're not alone, and that could have negative implications during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Researchers with CATALYST—the Center for the Advancement of Team Science, Analytics, and Systems Thinking in Health Services and Implementation Science Research—found that patients who were concerned their [personal health information](#) could be compromised if their medical records were shared electronically between [health care providers](#) were three times more likely to withhold information than those who didn't share that concern.

That's important because the U.S. Office for Civil Rights has relaxed some protections included in the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Department of Health and Human Services allows business associates, such as health care clearinghouses, the ability to make good-faith disclosures of medical information for [public health](#) and health oversight activities in response to COVID-19.

"While patients must be notified within 10 days, unintended effects of the revised rule are possible," said Matthew DePuccio, post-doctoral researcher in CATALYST and lead study author. "As the COVID-19 pandemic unfolds, health care providers and organizations should help patients understand how their personal health information could be used to monitor the spread of the coronavirus as well as improve the quality of health care delivery."

The research, published in the *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, found Black patients were more likely than white patients to withhold information. Patients who were older, married, employed, in good mental health and who had health insurance coverage were less likely to keep information from their provider.

"Taking a proactive approach and discussing the specific ways health care providers are safeguarding patients' personal health information could potentially ease patients' concerns about sharing sensitive information," DePuccio said.

More information: Matthew J. DePuccio et al. Patients' Perceptions About Medical Record Privacy and Security: Implications for Withholding of Information During the COVID-19 Pandemic, *Journal of General Internal Medicine* (2020). [DOI: 10.1007/s11606-020-05998-6](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-020-05998-6)

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