The Joint Commission has revised its position on prohibiting providers from texting orders for patient care, treatment or services to healthcare facilities. The rationale for its previously held position was three-fold: mobile devices that were used to send text messages could not ensure secure transmittal; there was no way to determine or verify the sender of the text; and there was no way to secure a copy of the sender’s message as documentation for the patient’s record.

Citing advances in technology, particularly the increase in secure text messaging platforms that address the aforementioned concerns, The Joint Commission (TJC) has altered its position for all accreditation programs. Effective immediately, TJC will allow practitioners that adhere to “professional standards of practice, laws and governing regulations”\(^1\) to send text messages through a secure text messaging platform that includes all of the following elements:\(^2\)

- Secure sign-on process
- Encrypted messaging
- Delivery and read receipts
- Date and time stamp
- Customized message retention time frames
- Specific contact list for individuals authorized to receive and record orders

The Joint Commission cautions that organizations which allow orders to be submitted via text messaging are still expected to comply with the standard that addresses the components of a complete medication order and what needs to be done when an order is incomplete or unclear (see Medication Management Standard MM.04.01.01).\(^3\) The Joint Commission further urges organizations to develop text messaging policies and procedures that address dating, timing, confirmation, authentication and documentation of texted orders.\(^4\)

In addition to the foregoing, The Joint Commission recommends hospitals should:

- Document the functionality and security of their messaging platform in an attestation type of format
- Outline circumstances when texting is prohibited
- Monitor text usage
- Audit/assess adherence to policies
- Incorporate text messaging information into a risk management plan and assess the plan
- Educate all staff on text messaging policies and procedures\(^5\)

Coverys Risk Management recommends assembling a team to clearly address the following:

- What constitutes authentication by the ordering provider
- The format used and the means and method to integrate the text message into the patient’s electronic medical record (EMR) and processes to use if the EMR system is down
- A method to manually enter the texted provider order into the order entry system if the text message system is not integrated with the EMR. This process may be similar to the process for
addressing telephone orders.

- How staff members may obtain answers if they have questions about text messaging orders

We hope you found this Risk Update helpful. If you have questions or would like further resources on this topic, please contact your Coverys Risk Management Consultant.

The following additional text messaging resources are also available from the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology:

- [How Can You Protect and Secure Health Information When Using a Mobile Device?](#)
- [Five steps organizations can take to manage mobile devices used by health care providers and professionals](#)

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References:

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.

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