

## **Digital Photo Security: What Plastic Surgeons Need to Know**

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### **Background**

Sharing and storing digital patient photos occurs daily in plastic surgery.<sup>1</sup> Two major risks associated with the practice, data theft and Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) violations, have been dramatically amplified by high-speed data connections and digital camera ubiquity. In this article, we review what plastic surgeons need to know in order to mitigate those risks. We discuss how properly implemented cloud storage solutions (CSS) can meet plastic surgeons' needs while maintaining HIPAA-compliance.<sup>2</sup>

### **Methods**

Through informal discussions with plastic surgeons, we identified the most common photo sharing and storage methods. For each method, a literature search was performed to identify the risks of data theft and HIPAA violations. HIPAA violation risks were confirmed by the middle author (P.T.R.), a compliance liaison and privacy officer. A comprehensive review of HIPAA-compliant CSS was performed. When possible, informal interviews with CSS representatives were conducted.

### **Results**

The most common sharing and storage methods are not HIPAA-compliant, and several are prone to data theft. Our review of CSS identified six HIPAA-compliant vendors who have strong-to-excellent security protocols and policies. These options are reasonably priced.

### **Conclusions**

Digital photography and technological advances offer major benefits to plastic surgeons, but are not without risks. A proper understanding of data security and HIPAA regulations needs to be applied to these technologies in order to safely capture their benefits. CSS offers efficient photo sharing and storage with layers of security to ensure HIPAA compliance and mitigate data theft risk.

## References:

1. DiSaia, J. P., Ptak, J. J. & Achauer, B. M. Digital photography for the plastic surgeon. *Plast. Reconstr. Surg.* 102, 569–573 (1998).

2. Which Cloud Storage Services are HIPAA Compliant | TMHI Blog. TMH Institute Blog at <<http://telehealth.org/blog/which-cloud-storage-services-are-hipaa-compliant/>>

## Figure Legend:

**Figure 1:** Various storage and sharing options are shown along with their level of security and efficiency.

