

HCCA Compliance 101, Fifth Edition

Chapter 5. Communication, Education, and Training

Communicating your program's expectations and goals is key to its success. You can communicate the compliance message using many methods—from person-to-person interactions to educational materials to in-person and virtual training sessions for staff. Whichever form it takes, communication needs to occur at all levels in the organization. Regular processes of communication with the board, management, and staff are key to a successful compliance program.

Your compliance communication must be clear, concise, and creative. Compliance-related information can be difficult to understand, because so much of it is buried in thousands of pages of government or legal documents. It is not uncommon that this information is written in such a way that putting it into practice can also be difficult. Remember—compliance may not be an exciting topic for everyone, so be creative and use different communication methods. This will keep your program fresh and exciting within the organization.

The 3 Cs of Communication

- Clear
- Concise
- Creative

Reaching Your Audience

A compliance program needs to reach several different audiences within an organization. Senior management communications should include high-level updates or describe specific areas that need to be escalated. There should already be buy-in for the compliance program at this level, so communications are used to sustain that buy-in and keep management informed. Staff-level communication should include written standards of conduct, policies, and procedures and should be clear and easy to understand. These documents should be distributed to all staff. What good is the compliance program if no one in the organization knows it exists?

This communication can happen in various ways. You can go to each site of operations and listen to staff's overall challenges in the field. You can conduct one-on-one training. Consider using a virtual business communications program such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams. Use role-playing or case study exercises during education sessions. These are just a few ideas to try, but there are many other ways to get the compliance message out.

Another idea is to look for ways your organization celebrates successes and tap into them. If there is a holiday party, consider contributing in some visible and fun way (doing a skit or singing a karaoke song, for example), if that fits your organization's culture. Trinkets with a compliance theme or message can be popular, too, assuming the budget allows. Cups or pens can be inexpensive enough to allow distribution to all employees. Posters, brochures, and business-sized cards can also be effective. Consider holding a compliance open house or bring

your department “on the road” by visiting other clinics or departments. Email alerts targeted to affected staff are a good way to get attention. You can be creative—there are many ways to keep the compliance message in front of staff. Just be sure to use those messages sparingly; if used too often they will lose their sense of urgency. Your reporting system is also a communication tool. Make sure all employees know about the hotline or other reporting systems you have in place. And as much as is possible, get back to staff members with results—of investigating hotline questions, compliance successes, and audits.

If your workers are remote, you can communicate in several ways to your virtual audience. Ideas include using web banners on the intranet or employee communications with key messages around risk areas (e.g., privacy). You can also try web education sessions that are interactive and have real-time scenarios that might relate to common occurrences for staff. Podcasts are another lively and entertaining way to communicate about compliance.

Yet, the most important communication device is an open-door policy in the compliance department. If working in a virtual environment, encourage employees to contact the compliance officer directly by phone or email. Encourage managers to be open to employee questions. If working on-site, encourage all staff members to stop by the department, and remind them that they can always email or call the compliance office with questions or concerns. Compliance personnel, managers, physicians, and supervisors should constantly be attentive to conversations employees have and subjects they bring up. Such conversations may reveal compliance-related information. The accessibility of the compliance officer will communicate much more than the specifics of regulations and laws—it will communicate a sense of mutual trust and common goals. Remember, however you reach your audience, the most important goal is to communicate, communicate, communicate!

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