To Whom It May Concern:

RTI International, a nonprofit research organization, is working under contract with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to implement a patient experience of care survey about surgeries and procedures performed in Hospital Outpatient Departments (HOPDs) or Ambulatory Surgery Centers (ASCs) known as the Outpatient and Ambulatory Surgery CAHPS (OAS CAHPS) Survey national reporting program. This program has been voluntary since 2016.

As part of CMS’ continued effort to explore possible efficiencies for the survey, RTI will be conducting a Web mode experiment with selected facilities. The Web mode experiment will consist of three consecutive months of data collection using five methods (or modes) of contact: mail-only, telephone-only, Web-only, Web with mail follow-up and Web with telephone follow-up. Patients will be randomly assigned to one of the five modes. CMS and RTI will use the findings from the mode experiment to investigate the impact of adding Web-based data collection as a survey administration mode for national implementation. Your hospital or ASC has been selected to participate in the 2019 Web mode experiment.

The purpose of this letter is to address any concerns that your facility may have about RTI’s compliance with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) during the 2019 Web mode experiment. RTI is a Business Associate to CMS on this contract and will follow the HIPAA requirements for protecting the privacy of your patients and their protected health information (PHI). In particular, we wish to assure you the following:

- RTI will only use PHI provided by your facility for purposes of the above research study.
- Your facility will post the patient lists on a secure website, and RTI will transfer the files to be housed on a HIPAA-compliant share located in RTI’s Moderate Network. This network meets the Federal Information Processing Standards (FIPS) Moderate level for data security and confidentiality.
- RTI will destroy all PHI at the conclusion of the study.

As CMS’ Business Associate responsible for evaluating the facilities for the 2019 Web mode experiment, it is permissible and safe for HOPDs and ASCs to release the PHI to RTI. Because RTI is not directly providing a service to the HOPDs and ASCs, it is not necessary for each facility to enter into separate Business Associate Agreements with RTI. The Business Associate Agreement between CMS and RTI is under Contract No. GS-00F-354CA, Task Order No. HHSM-500-2017-00015G.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at (919) 485-2742 or mwewer@rti.org if you have any further questions about RTI’s compliance with HIPAA on research projects funded by the U.S. government.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Martha Wewer, JD
RTI Privacy Officer