

## Report on Patient Privacy Volume 22, Number 1. January 13, 2022 Peers Mourn Loss of Chris Apgar, Beloved HIPAA Expert

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By Theresa Defino

It wouldn't be too much of an exaggeration to say that fans of the late Chris Apgar seem to have run out of words to describe the respected and well-liked HIPAA professional, who formed his own consulting business 17 years ago after serving in privacy and security positions at Providence Health & Services organizations in Portland, Oregon.

Ever since Julia Huddleston, Apgar's wife and partner in Apgar and Associates, shared the news that Apgar had died unexpectedly on Dec. 11, tributes, remembrances and condolences have poured in. In addition to private emails to Huddleston, friends and colleagues left nearly 70 comments on his LinkedIn page<sup>[1]</sup> and more than a dozen accompany his obituary published online.<sup>[2]</sup>

Many have used the words generous, knowledgeable and amazing to describe Apgar, who was 60. "Kind, helpful and brilliant" is what Kelly McLendon, chief compliance officer with the consulting firm CompliancePro Solutions, called Apgar. A "man of honesty and integrity," wrote Gerry Blass, president and CEO of ComplyAssistant. Another person expressed gratitude that Apgar, while on vacation, helped mitigate a ransomware attack.

Among the words of praise and sorrow is a note by this author, *RPP* Editor Theresa Defino. My relationship with Apgar goes back more than 15 years, and he remained a trusted—and available—source of wisdom for *RPP* readers. In 2008, Apgar wrote a series of articles for *RPP* on HIPAA compliance and was always available—truly, he never said "no," even when asked multiple follow-up questions, and got back by my deadline.

As his obituary states, "Chris was an educator, mentor, and leader. He was a nationally recognized expert and educational instructor on multiple topics including information security and privacy. He taught frequently in classrooms and at conferences and facilitated panels dealing with numerous topics. Chris was also active in his local community, developing and conducting educational webinars, and assisting physicians and other medical professionals in Oregon and across the country. First and foremost, Chris loved answering questions, offering guidance, and helping people in whatever capacity he could."

Apgar was conversant on complicated information technology strategies and was as current as the next person (or more so) on emerging threats. But he also grasped the timeless and unchanging nature of behaviors that lead to breaches and other HIPAA noncompliance.

"Privacy and security issues arise often not because of malicious action on the part of an individual or entity. They occur because of carelessness, lack of training, insufficient assessment of risks and sometimes lack of knowledge of what is considered appropriate privacy and security practices," Apgar wrote more than a decade ago.<sup>[3]</sup> "HIPAA aside, all health care organizations need to pay attention to potential areas of exposure of patient PHI [protected health information] inappropriately."

Apgar also understood—and rejected—the excuse that safeguarding PHI is too expensive, adding, "Many of the

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solutions that address privacy and security risks tend not to be difficult or costly to implement.”

Huddleston plans to continue the consulting business, and asked that donations be made to a favorite charity of Apgar’s, the Oregon Coalition Against Domestic & Sexual Violence.<sup>[4]</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Chris Apgar, President and CEO, Apgar and Associates LLC, LinkedIn, accessed January 10, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3mWbmWX>

<sup>2</sup> “Christopher Robin Apgar,” obituary, Dignity Memorial, accessed January 10, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3qONbLj>.

<sup>3</sup> Chris Apgar, “Case Studies In Privacy Problems And Their Optimal Solutions,” *Report on Patient Privacy* 8, no. 5 (May 2008).

<sup>4</sup> “Donate Now,” Oregon Coalition Against Domestic & Sexual Violation, accessed January 10, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3pZroTK>.

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