First, you should always be sure that you have called the correct phone number. You can do this by making sure the message on the answering machine either states the phone number or name of the person you are trying to call.

- Messages left on answering machines can be listened to by anyone who can press the button. Often this might be someone who the patient has not confided in about their health care. Therefore, caution and minimum necessary are always best practices.

- When leaving an appointment reminder you may leave the patient’s name, the physician’s name, and the date/time of the appointment plus a callback number. You should not leave any other information that would suggest the nature or reason for the appointment.

- When you need to leave information related to a past admission, office visit, or test results - you should just leave a message stating that you are calling from Vanderbilt and a callback number for them to return the call. Topics can then be discussed directly. As always, if the situation is urgent and can’t wait then you are allowed to use your professional judgment and leave only the minimum necessary.

- You may also leave a message with a family member or other person who answers the phone when the patient is not home. The HIPAA Privacy Rule permits covered entities to disclose limited information to family members, friends, or other persons regarding an individual’s care, even when the individual is not present. However, covered entities should use professional judgment to assure that such disclosures are in the best interest of the individual and limit the information disclosed.