

# **Hiding in Plain Sight: Use of Realistic Surrogates to Reduce Exposure of Protected Health Information in Clinical Text**

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## **Appendix A: IRB Survey Regarding HIPS De-identification**

This appendix reports the results of a Web-based survey of Institutional Review Board (IRB) managers in the HMO Research Network regarding clinical text de-identification practices and attitudes toward the Hiding In Plain Sight (HIPS) approach. It includes a brief summary of the survey methodology followed by a summary of responses to each survey question.

### ***Survey Methods***

To preliminarily assess attitudes toward the Hiding in Plain Sight (HIPS) approach to clinical text de-identification we surveyed Institutional Review Board (IRB) and Human Subjects Review Committee (HSRC) managers from institutions affiliated with the HMO Research Network (HMORN). Sixteen managers were invited to respond to a ten-question Web-based survey. The HMORN is a network of research institutions that individually and collectively conduct a wide range of health-related studies using patient data, some of which include clinical text, extracted from the electronic medical record systems of their affiliated care delivery organizations. Survey questions addressed local methods used to de-identify text, and elicited managers' opinions about the acceptability of automated methods to de-identify clinical text, including the HIPS approach. The HIPS approach was described and illustrated by an example similar to that provided in Figure

1 of the manuscript. Each potential respondent received one email invitation containing a link to an anonymous online survey, one follow up voice mail reminder, and two additional follow-up e-mail reminders encouraging participation in the survey. The full text of the survey and tabulated results follow. Eight of the managers responded to the survey, for a response rate of 50%. The percentage of respondents completing all questions was 100% (8/8).

A summary of survey responses follows.

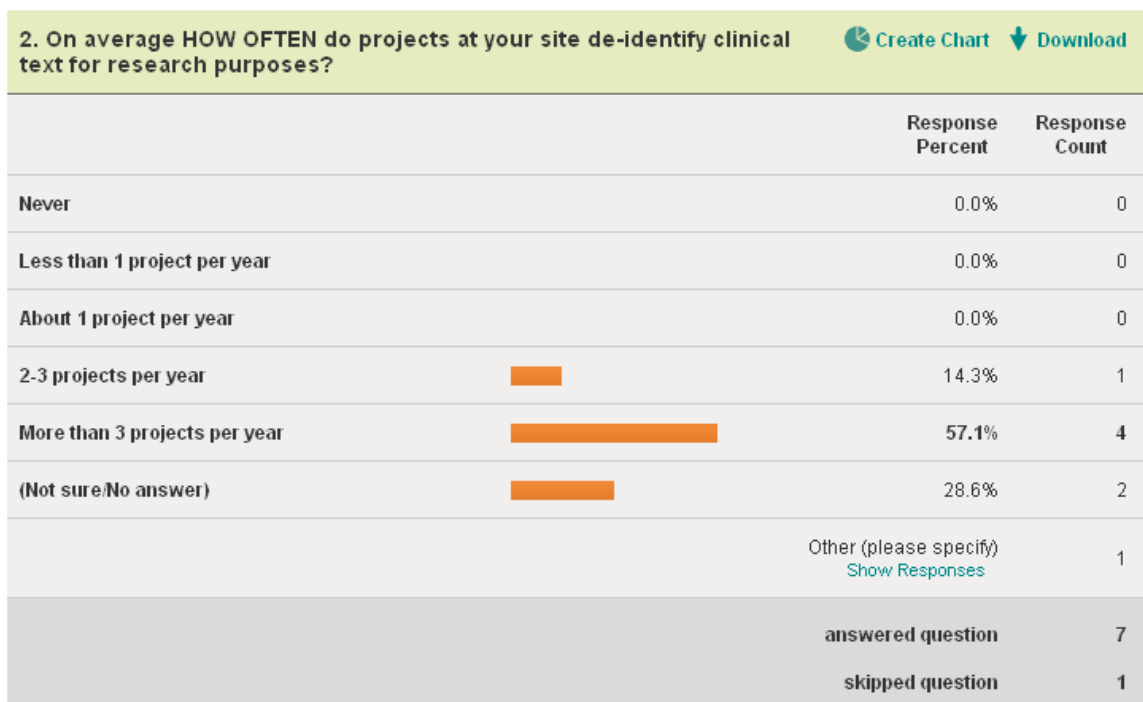
## Summary of Survey Responses

The full text of survey questions and a summary of individual responses to each question, including “Other (please specify)” responses, is provided below.

### Question 1 of 10

This question was used for planning purposes. It is unrelated to the substantive issues addressed in the survey and has been omitted.

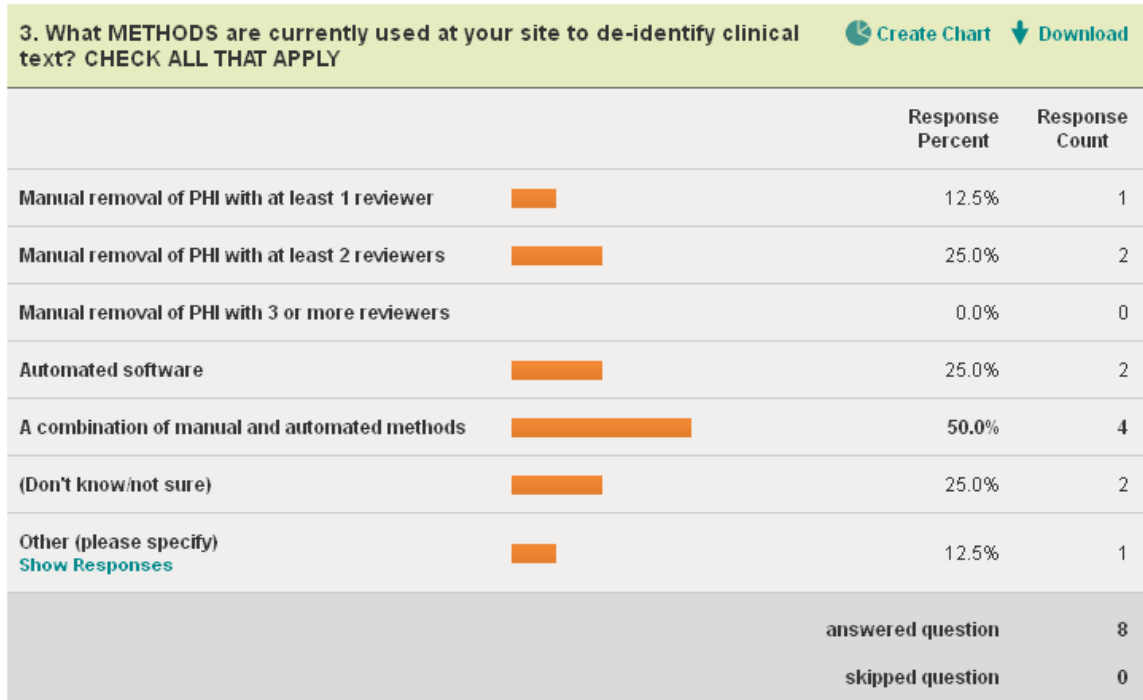
### Question 2 of 10



Question 2 “other” responses:

- I'm not sure but I don't think it is common. HIPAA waiver or LDS more often used.

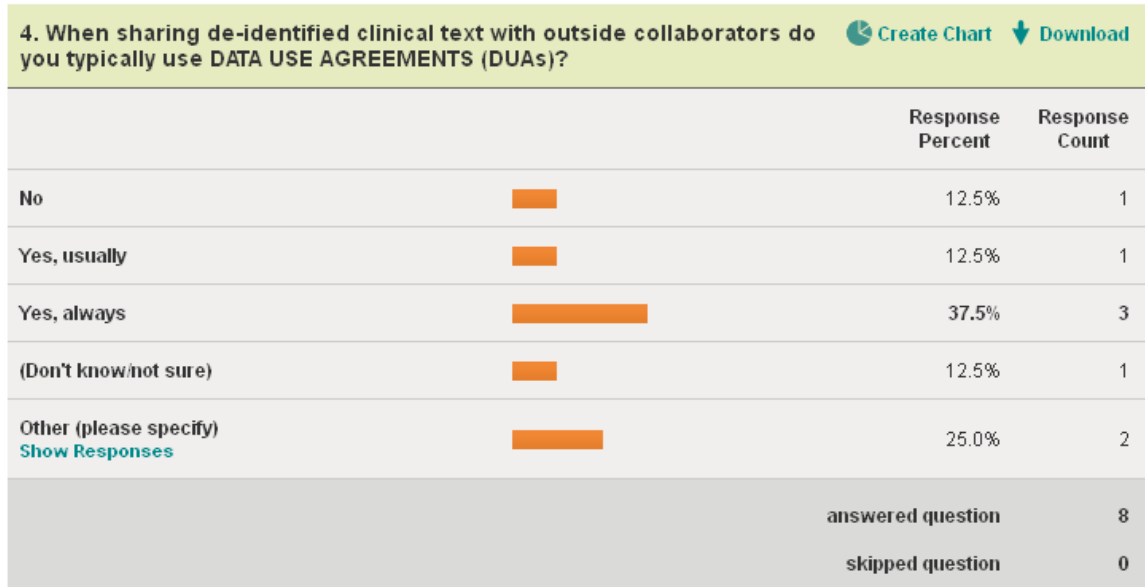
### Question 3 of 10



Question 3 “other” responses:

- For many studies, we have HIPAA-trained investigators query clinical datasets for specific fields of interest, so as to create a de-identified "research data set." This data set is all that the investigator works with. I am not sure if this is "manual" or "automated," but in any event, no paper records are involved.

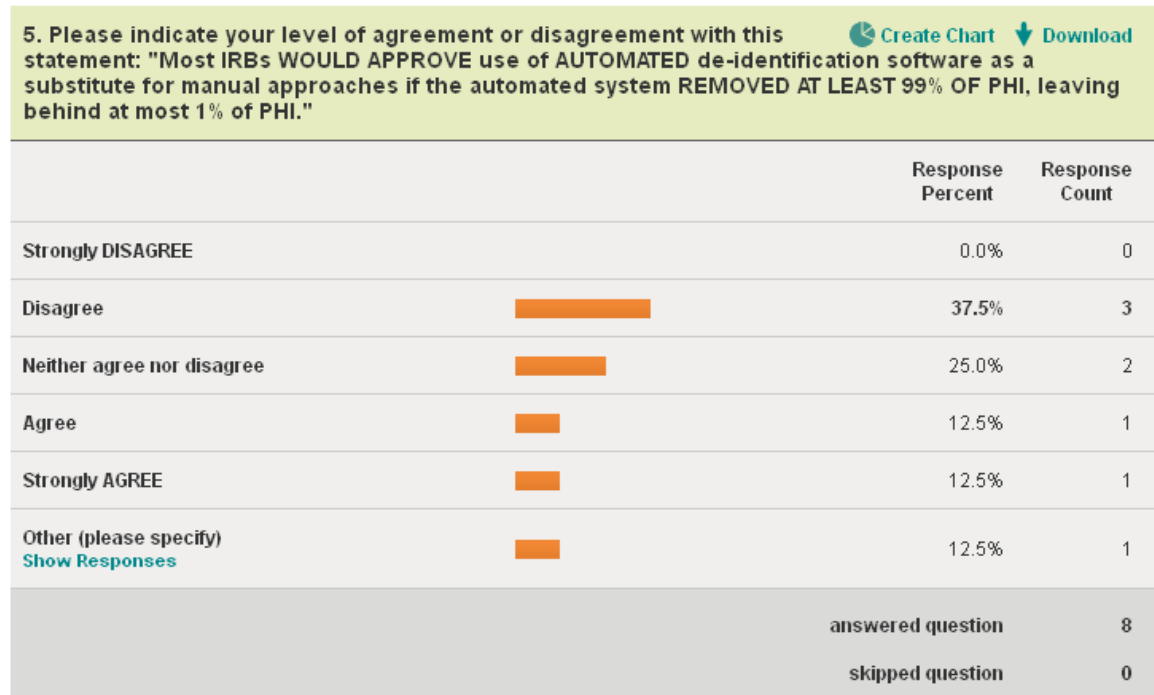
## Question 4 of 10



Question 4 “other” responses:

- It depends on the source and the nature of the data. Outside collaborators do not ever see raw clinical data, of course, and many only are involved in data analysis (they do not even see the de-identified data set).
- It's required, but I don't know that it's executed.

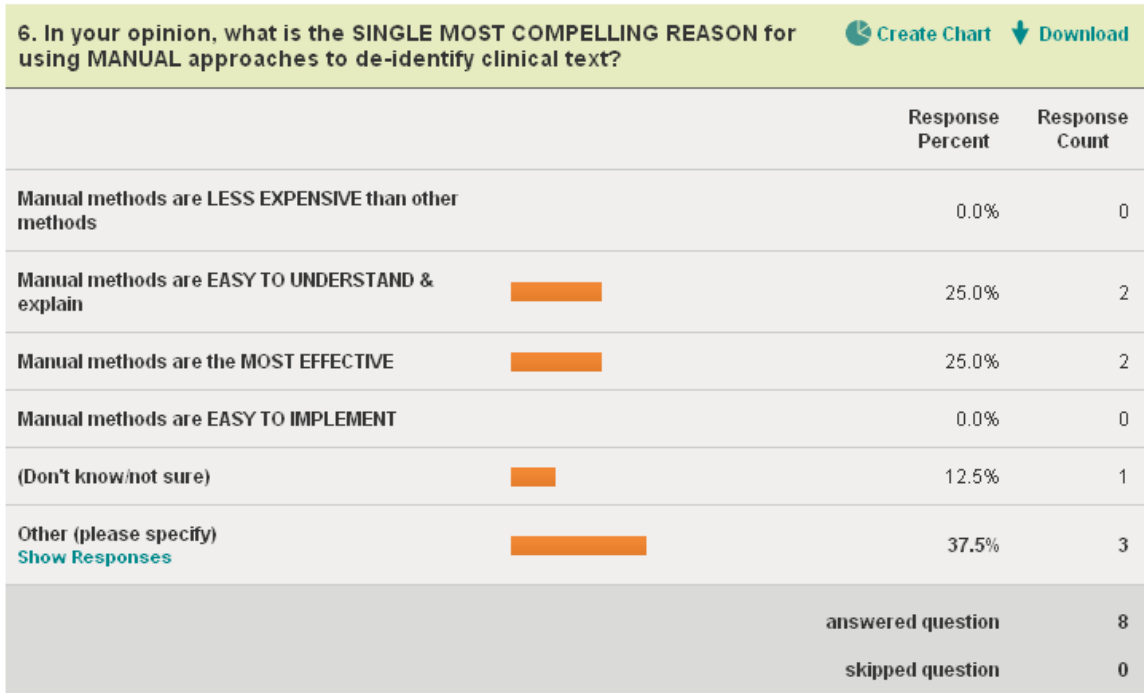
## Question 5 of 10



Question 5 "other" responses:

- Can't speak for most IRBs

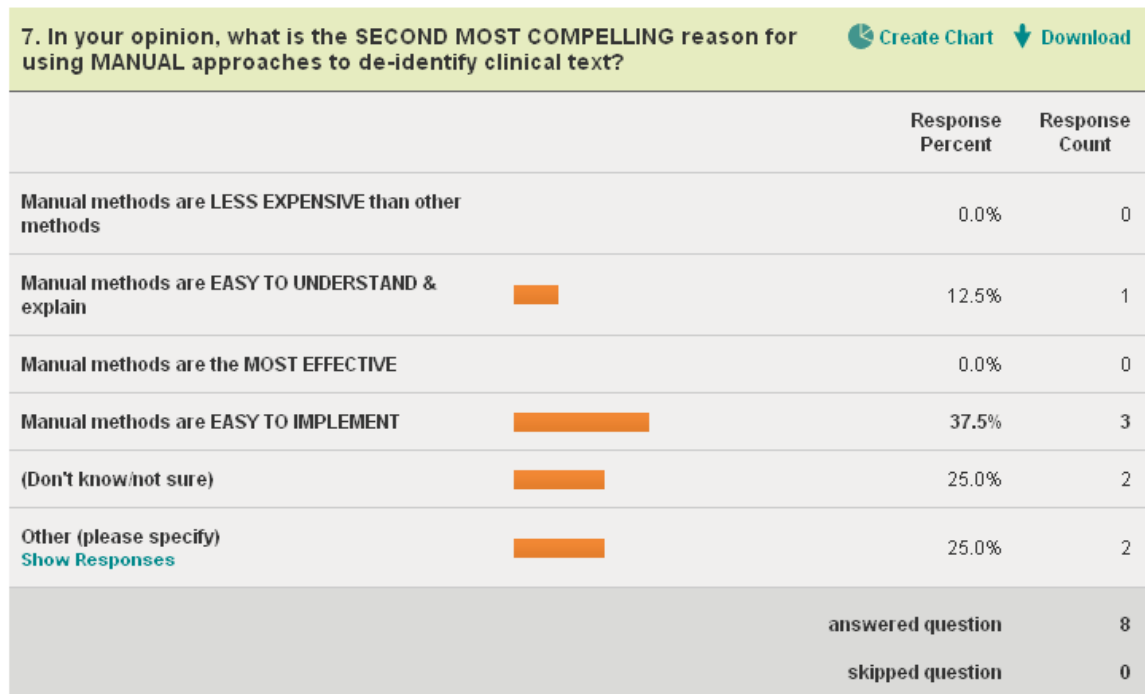
Question 6 of 10



Question 6 “other” responses:

- The most compelling reason is that we do not have automatic methods for producing de-identified data. That means that the manual methods automatically become easier to implement, most effective, less expensive, etc.
- Accountability trail
- Lack of training on electronic systems for de-identification

## Question 7 of 10



Question 7 “other” responses:

- See above
- Limits volume of materials released



## Question 8 of 10

The HIPS Method:

There is a method of de-identifying clinical text called the "Hiding In Plain Sight" (HIPS) method. Instead of removing PHI, HIPS replaces it with realistic-looking "fake" PHI. This fake or "surrogate" PHI resembles real patient information but does not represent any actual patient.

When ~95% of real PHI in a document is replaced via the HIPS method, it is hypothesized that the remaining ~5% cannot be distinguished from the 95% that is fake. If this is true, the real PHI is said to be "hiding in plain sight."

Illustration:

Real clinical text containing REAL PHI might look like this:

```
=====
LINE 01: James Smith is a 61 year old ...
LINE 12: at the request of Dr Mary Johnson ...
LINE 19: PLAN: Dr Williams and I discussed ...
LINE 26: reviewed with Mr. Smith on 5/11/2010 ...
LINE 29: Mr. Smith has a consultation ...
=====
```

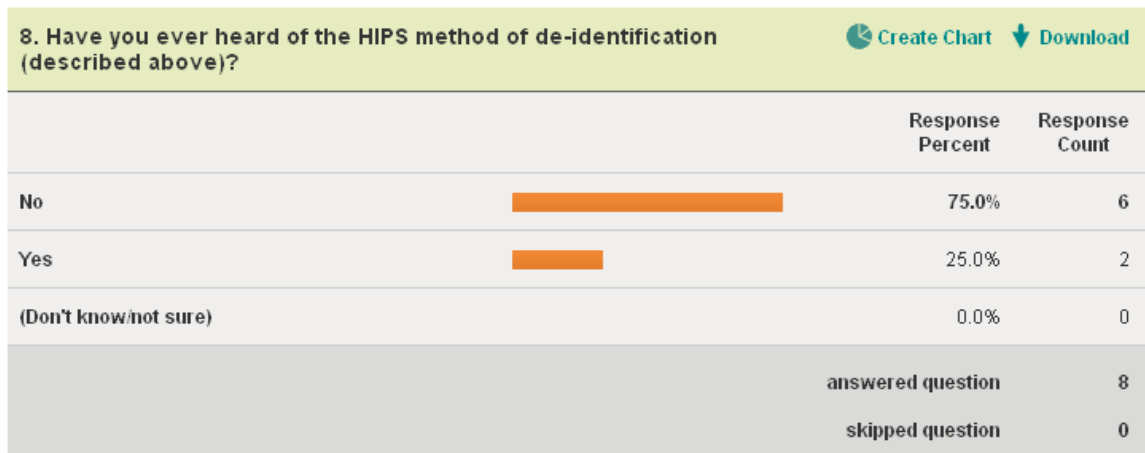
A HIPS de-identified version of the above is shown below, where all PHI except the name "Williams" (LINE 19) has been replaced by fake/surrogate PHI:

```
=====
NOTE: PERSONAL IDENTIFYING INFORMATION IN THIS
DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPLACED WITH REALISTIC
APPEARING SURROGATES. USE OF THIS DOCUMENT IS
SUBJECT TO THE TERMS OF A DATA USE AGREEMENT.
-----
LINE 01: Robert Davis is a 63 year old ...
LINE 12: at the request of Dr Patricia Brown ...
LINE 19: PLAN: Dr Williams and I discussed ...
LINE 26: reviewed with Mr. Davis on 4/27/2010 ...
LINE 29: Mr. Davis has a consultation ...
=====
```

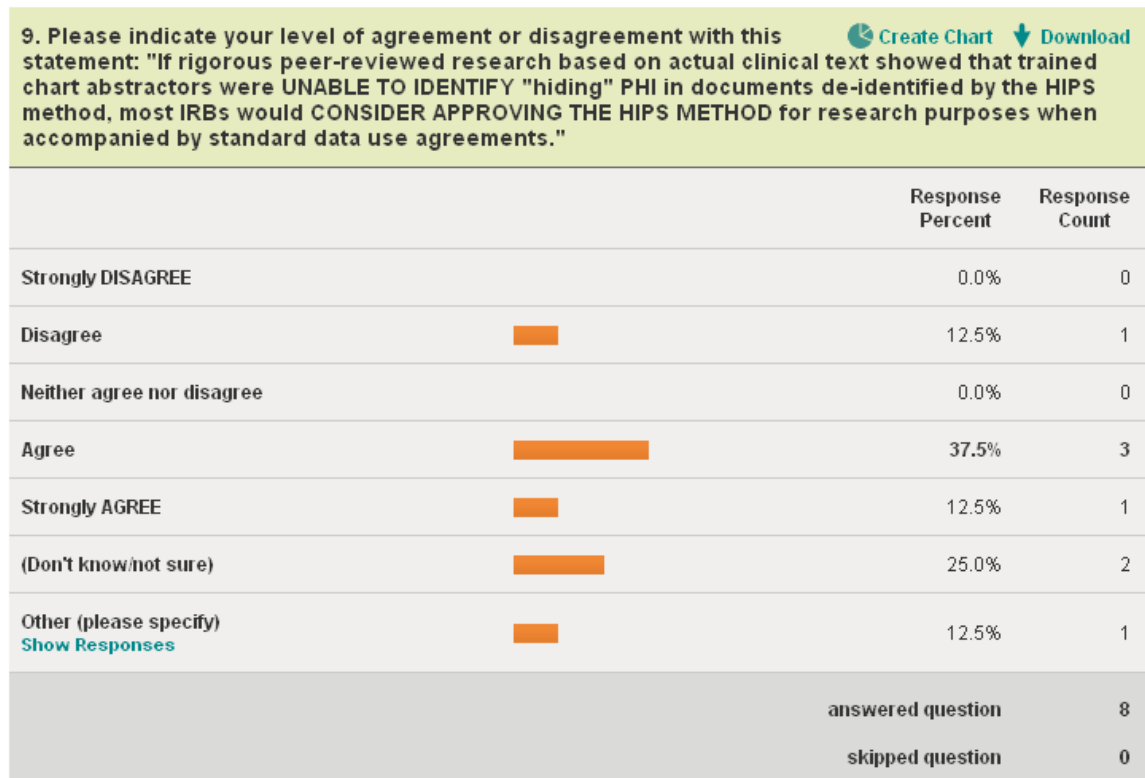
In the above example of the HIPS method, the name "Dr Williams" is "hiding in plain sight." All other PHI has been replaced with fake/surrogate PHI.

Please consider this example of the HIPS method when answering the following questions.

### Question 8 of 10 (continued)



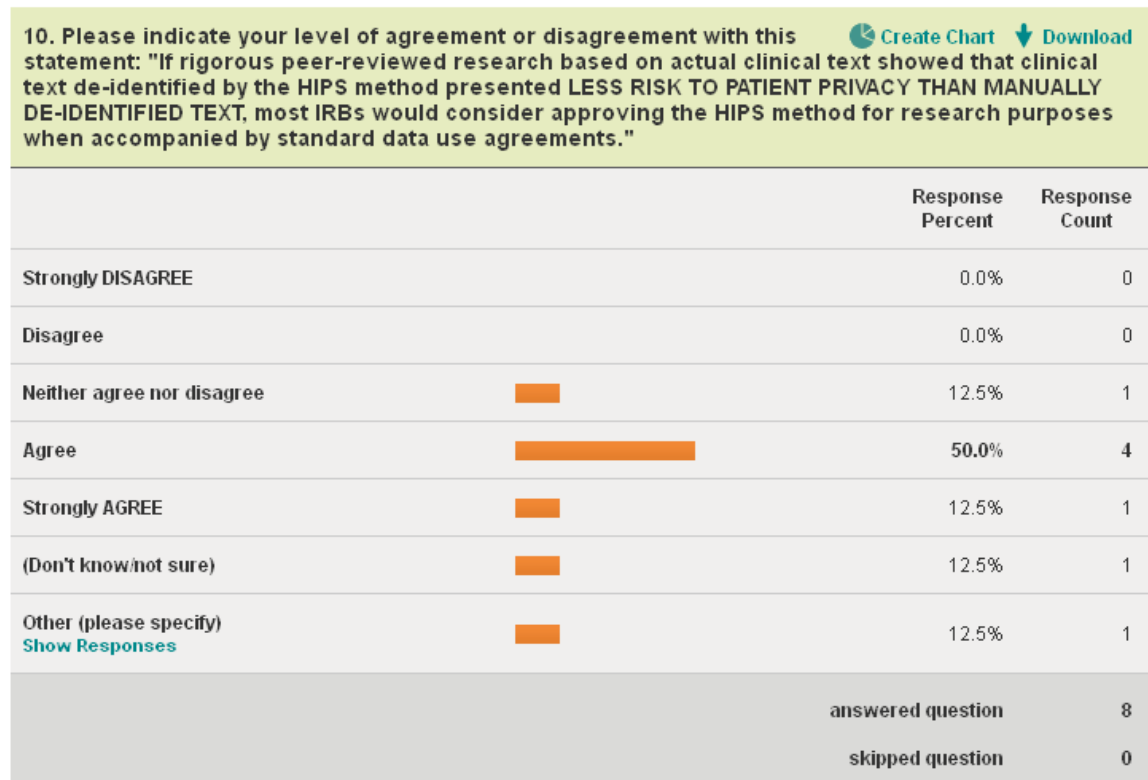
## Question 9 of 10



Question 9 "other" responses:

- I think this is great. I am not sure that most IRBs would think it is HIPAA compliant to purposefully leave some PHI in place.

## Question 10X of 10



Question 10 "other" responses:

- They would consider, but whether they would approve depends on other protections, size & scope of release, etc.