

Apr 17, 2003

An excerpt from Progressive Policy Institute (of the Democratic Leadership Council) *Health Policy Wire* newsletter Vol 1, No. 8: "[Want More Privacy? Let Patients Control Access to Medical Records](#)"

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Want More Privacy? Let Patients Control Access to Medical Records

It's not just health care providers complaining about the new privacy rules. Some patient groups believe the new rules are too weak. Three days before the new rule took effect, a coalition of patient advocates filed suit to block the new rule alleging that the rules actually decrease privacy. In a sense, that's true. By setting standards for privacy, the rules clear the way for more systematic use of medical data and will accelerate the movement from paper records to electronic databases.

But patients are not likely to get much greater privacy protections through legal or political action unless the new privacy rules suffer a meltdown. There are simply too many interest groups with a stake in using medical data that can block further protections. Moreover, patients themselves stand to benefit from lower costs and higher quality if electronically available medical data is used appropriately on their behalf.

One sensible compromise that balances efficiency with privacy is to allow patients themselves to control the level of access to their medical records. That's the model being developed by the non-profit Patient Safety Institute, highlighted by Sen. Tom Carper (D-DE) in the latest issue of BLUEPRINT magazine. As Carper writes PSI's vision is to create a network for exchanging medical records electronically where patients control who has access to their records:

"As the world becomes more wired, some fear that instant access to medical records could result in a loss of personal privacy. PSI understands that concern and has put in place safeguards to limit exposure of records. Some of the technological safeguards include never using a patient's Social Security number as the patient identification number; never releasing medical records to anyone without a patient's express authorization; physically separating a patient's clinical and demographic data; and using cutting edge encryption and virtual private network technology. The most important safeguard is the strong leadership on PSI's board, which includes some of the nation's leading patient advocates."

Carper urges elected officials and health policymakers across the country to encourage widespread adoption of the PSI model as it begins to ramp up its operations. Giving patients control over electronic medical records will be just as important, if not more so, than legal protections.