

# Health Information Compliance Alert

## Health Information News

### Biometric Privacy?

Perceived as complex and intrusive, biometric network authentication's ability to create highly secure networks may outweigh all its misconceptions. This heightened level of security is expected to benefit the healthcare industry specifically by allowing it to become and remain assuredly HIPAA compliant, Business Wire reports.

"Healthcare companies have realized the importance of replacing alphanumeric-based network passwords with biometric authentications that can provide simplified and secure access to health records," said **Jarad Carleton**, an industry analyst with Frost & Sullivan.

Biometric vendors claim the solution will remove loopholes in security procedures by storing single username and passwords that can be automatically retrieved -- reducing time and increasing worker productivity. However, for restricted IT budgets, the costs may outweigh the benefits as biometric software works in conjunction with expensive hardware peripherals like iris-scanning cameras and fingerprint scanners.

Yet according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, crimes relating to network security tampering stress the immediate need to enhance internal security systems. Statistically, 90 percent of network security breaches are internal and 75 percent of the companies involved suffered significant financial losses.

New analysis from Frost & Sullivan's report, "U.S. Biometric Network Authentication Market," indicates that this market accrued revenues worth \$115.5 million in 2003 and expects to expand significantly by 2010. For more information, go to [www.autoid.frost.com](http://www.autoid.frost.com).

### HIPAA Goes to School

Homer City's Homer-Center School Board plans to enact a policy next month that will apply HIPAA to the medical information of the districts' students and employees, says the Indiana Gazette.

The new policy will regulate how school officials use medical information, said Superintendent Dr. **Joseph Marcoline**. Schools routinely maintain their students' vaccination records and track those students who have HIV or diseases that could lead to seizures.

"That information is sometimes shared with faculty who deal with those students. The policy ensures that we don't share that outside the circle of people who need to know," Marcoline explained.

The board appointed **Beverly Gardner** to serve as the HIPAA privacy officer. She will decide which records should be restricted.

The board will vote on the policy April 15.

### Health Information Groups Oppose Outsourcing Regs

The American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA), California Health Information Association, American Association for Medical Transcription (AAMT) and Medical Transcription Industry Alliance (MTIA) are urging lawmakers to

avoid taking regulatory action against offshore health information processing, according to a March 22 AHIMA release.

These associations contend that by eliminating the option of offshoring PHI, these regulations could "further exacerbate the shortage of health information workers and have a direct and immediate adverse effect on patients and healthcare organizations," said **Linda Ross**, AHIMA executive VP and CEO.

With implications that include disruption of patient care, loss of accreditation by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Health Care Organizations and disruption of payment to healthcare providers, "legislation restricting outsourcing would quickly overwhelm the current workforce," warned MTIA president **Sean Carroll**.

"Legislation and health information technologies must improve deployment of our scarce knowledge workers to perform more sophisticated functions as demand for services increases and the healthcare industry prepares for an electronic health environment," said AAMT executive director **Peter Preziosi**.

Instead of regulation, these groups advocate increased investment in health information workforce development and technologies that will advance healthcare outcomes and communication technology, along with creating solutions that enforce HIPAA and support advancements that will improve the quality and cost of healthcare.

However, privacy groups continue to worry over the protection of private health information in other countries. For more information, go to [www.ahima.org/dc/positions/PositionStatement31604.cfm](http://www.ahima.org/dc/positions/PositionStatement31604.cfm).