Health Information Compliance Alert

Health Information News DRIVERS' LICENSES SET TO GO NATIONAL

The debate over national ID cards that erupted following the September 11 attacks may end up being circumvented, as a move to radically augment driver's licenses gains momentum.

In a recent conference report to the Department of Transportation, Congress urged the department to develop model nationwide guidelines specifying the personal information that should be electronically encoded on driver's licenses. While some states already store personal information electronically on their licenses, there is no national standard. Nor is there yet any national standard for machines that would allow a license's electronically encoded information to be read in every state.

Supporters of standardized, nationally readable drivers' licenses argue that augmenting the current system is more cost efficient than developing a new national ID card. The American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators, which already has its own guidelines for storing information, is planning to ask Congress for $100 million to help create the new licenses.

Despite current support, however, the potential new look of drivers' licenses worries privacy advocates, who are concerned that national standards would effectively transform licenses into de facto national ID cards without adequate public debate. Given the widespread use of licenses as ID, there are worries that the new licenses could be used to create a nationwide tracking system that follows citizens through any institutions requiring ID checks using the new license. To allay such fears, AAMVA officials have suggested limiting who can access state records to check the authenticity of licenses.

- A nasty e-mail could cost a Californiaman up to $100, 000 and one year in prison.

On January 18, Michael Logan pleadedguilty in a San Francisco court to charges that hehacked into a Catholic Healthcare West computer in late November, 1999. After breaking in, Logan assumed an employee's identity and emailed 30,000 CHW employees and associates. His note contained insulting remarks about a number of those employees, including the note's purported author. Damages to CHW as a result of Logan's intrusion were estimated at roughly $25, 0000.

Sentencing is scheduled for April 26, 2002.

- The search for reliable health information on the Internet just got easier.

Thirteen health information sites have received a nod of approval from the American Accreditation HealthCare Commission/URAC. Sites that passed muster had to satisfy numerous requirements, from guaranteeing user privacy, to disclosing corporate sponsorship, to ensuring that site content had been reviewed by licensed doctors.

The URAC accreditation comes none to soon, as the number of people going online for health information has spiked in the months following the anthrax scare.

To view the list of accredited sites, go to http://webapps.urac.org/websiteaccreditation/portal/consumer/verify.asp

- The recent bioterror scare may soon force health care providers to look more closely at their patient information.

Legislation advancing through the Utah House of Representatives will require health care providers to report potential cases of bioterrorism to the state's Department of Health. The bill, sponsored by Rep. Sheryl Allen, R-Bountiful, imposes a 24-hour deadline on the reporting of any illnesses that could be caused by bioterrorism. The bill also requires pharmacists to report unusual "drug-related events," including sudden increases in prescriptions that treat bioterror

diseases like anthrax, as well as increases in the number of requests for information about such drugs. Similarly, medical labs will have to report the results of any tests that confirm the presence of a disease with bioterrorism potential.