

Health Information Compliance Alert

HIPAA Privacy: TEMPORARY INSANITY?

A gentle zephyr swept hospital records all along a downtown street in Allentown, PA, and the temporary employee who allegedly scattered patients private medical information may have to face a tempest of liability under privacy laws.

A temporary employee working for **Easton Hospital** in Allentown, PA is being held responsible for the dispersal of roughly 100 confidential medical records on a public street, according to The Morning Call. The employee, a 30-year-old Allentown woman, told a local police official she took the documents to her home Aug. 6 to organize them and planned to return them the following morning.

Wilson police chief **Richard Nace** believes the woman became flustered after arguing with the person who was driving her to work, and she dropped the records as she left the car, The Morning Call reports.

According to The Morning Call, whose office sits less than a block away from where the incident occurred, several patients whose medical information lay among those collected expressed dismay that their data was exposed in such a public venue. Some patients also worried that some people may use the documents for illicit purposes such as financial gain, since the data contained Social Security numbers.

Nace is currently consulting with county, state and federal authorities to determine what, if any, criminal charges will be filed. State Health Department spokeswoman **Amy Zuccoloto** says her department will also join in the investigation.