



Push for Electronic Medical Records

Hurricane Katrina destroyed or stranded the medical records of untold numbers of people, bringing new attention to the need for electronic medical data. Lost medical records expose patients to considerable risk of medical mistakes as physicians are handicapped in diagnosing symptoms, understanding the possible effects of drugs, and assessing the benefits and risks of surgery. According to John Hutchins, founder of PinnacleCare and a healthcare advocate, "It's like a baseball player coming to bat without needed contact lenses or a tennis player using a bare hand instead of a racquet. You just don't have the tools to do the job and would rely on a lot of guessing. The problem is, this isn't a game, it's your health and your life."

Advocates say that electronic medical records could improve patient care and possibly save billions of dollars. Yet many doctors aren't investing in the technology because they may not reap the savings, but insurers and the government will, some researchers report. Less than 25 percent of U.S. hospitals and 20 percent of physician offices have adopted electronic medical records, according to the RAND Corporation. Usually, they're hospital- or doctor-specific and easily transferred and read by other health care providers. The ultimate goal of electronic medical records is a nationwide network, allowing quick access to a patient's history regardless of their location.

To help establish standards for implementing electronic records, U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Mike Leavitt has named a 16-member commission of representatives from hospital, doctor, insurance, government and patient-advocacy groups. "There may not have been an experience that demonstrates, for me or the country, more powerfully the need for electronic health records ... than Katrina," said Leavitt. The federal government's goal is to give most Americans computerized medical records within 10 years.

Source: www.cnn.com and www.hhs.gov

U.S. Department of Homeland Security Decisions Allow for Ease of International Travel

Travel industry insiders are breathing a sigh of relief with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS)'s two recent decisions to allow for continued ease of international travel to and from the United States. The decisions delay proposed DHS requirements for stricter passport guidelines for individuals traveling to and from many countries, which the travel industry has expressed concern would have an adverse effect on world travel.

The DHS plan, unveiled in April, originally named December 31, 2005, as the deadline for the first phase of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI). This initiative would require travelers to and from the Caribbean, Bermuda, Central and South America to present passports or other accepted secure documents at U.S. ports of entry. Currently, travelers need only a birth certificate and/or valid driver's license to travel between the U.S. and these locations. Under the revised requirements, passports will be required to and from all U.S. air, sea and land borders by December 31, 2007.

In June 2005, DHS announced that it would extend the deadline for a requirement that countries participating in Visa Waiver Program (VWP) must include biometric data when issuing passports. The revised deadlines include:

- As of October 26, 2005, all countries must issue passports with digital photos or the required chip (e-passport) containing biometric information about the individual.
- Anyone issued a passport prior to October 26, 2005, will be "grandfathered in" and allowed to visit the U.S. until the passport expires.
- All VWP countries must issue the required biometric chip (e-passport) by October 26, 2006.

Nearly 14 million visitors from 27 countries entered the U.S. from a Visa Waiver Program country in 2004. For a list of VWP countries, visit http://www.travel.state.gov/visa/temp/without/without_1990.html#2

Source: www.TIA.org

