

**OPENING STATEMENT OF
SENATOR GEORGE V. VOINOVICH, RANKING MEMBER
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT OF GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT,
THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

FEBRUARY 1, 2007

**PRIVATE HEALTH RECORDS: PRIVACY IMPLICATIONS OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S
HEALTH INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY INITIATIVE**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for calling this afternoon's hearing to examine privacy protections for health information technology.

The widespread adoption of health information technology, such as electronic health records (EHR), will revolutionize the health care profession. In fact, the Institute of Medicine, the National Committee on Vital and Health Statistics, and other expert panels have identified information technology as one of the most powerful tools in reducing medical errors and improving the quality of care. Unfortunately, our country's health care industry lags far behind other sectors of the economy in its investment in information technology.

The Institute of Medicine estimated in 1999 that there are nearly 98,000 deaths each year resulting from medical errors. Many of these deaths can be directly attributed to the inherent imperfections of our current paper-based health care system. This statistic is startling and one that I hope will motivate my colleagues to take a closer look at how the federal government can safely encourage the use of health information technology to improve our nation's health care delivery. Not only can technology save lives and improve the quality of health care, it also has the potential to reduce the cost of the delivery of health care. According to Rand Corporation, the health care delivery system in the United States could save approximately \$160 billion annually with the widespread use of electronic medical records.

As technology advances, the issues surrounding protection of personal information will continue to be at the forefront of people's minds. Individual citizens continue to express concern over the security of personal, confidential information whether it is contained in an electronic health record; stolen from laptops at the Department of Veterans Affairs; or a breach of security for credit card companies. However, the benefits of technology in the health care arena are undeniable, and I support the use of HIT. In fact, in the 109th Congress, I joined with Senator Carper to introduce the Federal Employees Electronic Personal Health Records Act. This bill would provide for the establishment and maintenance of electronic personal health records for individuals and family members enrolled in the Federal Employee Health Benefits Plan (FEHBP). I am hopeful the testimony today will assist my colleagues and me as we make decisions about implementing health IT, and I am personally look forward to learning from our witnesses ways Senator Carper and I might refine our legislation before reintroduction.

(over)

We are making progress on privacy protections. I am pleased that in 2004 the President issued an executive order specific to deployment of health information technology, including establishing a National Coordinator for Health Information Technology. Since then, the Coordinator and the Department of Health and Human Services have made considerable progress toward the adoption of interoperable health IT.

But, the successes have not come without some criticism. Dr. Kolodner, your office has an enormous responsibility - to continue to cultivate a strategic plan to guide implementation of nationwide, interoperable health information technology. I look forward to hearing how we in Congress can better support your efforts toward our shared goal of improving our health care system.

We must do all we can to facilitate cost-saving, and most importantly, life-saving health care technology that will benefit all Americans.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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