

Healthcare IT News

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Vendors, stakeholders aim to dispel privacy myths about EHRs

By [Diana Manos, Senior Editor](#) | 04/21/08 |

Healthcare IT vendors and other stakeholders at a recent Capitol Hill briefing sought to dispel what they called "privacy myths" concerning electronic health records.

"People are scaring lawmakers about data flying around the Internet," said [Justin Barnes](#), a board member of the Confidentiality Coalition and vice president of marketing at [Greenway Medical Technologies](#).

"You cannot [Google](#) patient health information stored in EHRs or in other secure HIT solutions. "

The EHR industry is secure through market forces, [Barnes](#) said. Healthcare IT (HIT) and EHR companies are inherently incentivized to use highest levels of security and encryption. No EHR company wants to lose their credibility, as it would fold their company, he said.

According to [Barnes](#), patient health information stored in EHRs is highly secure. "The HIT and EHR industry has spent hundreds of millions of dollars creating secure and encrypted solutions for use today," he said.

Anyone inside a medical practice can essentially access a paper file, [Barnes](#) said. Disclosure violations occur due to paper files and security violations, not privacy issues. Paper files can be copied or removed without knowledge of staff.

In addition, natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina render millions of records useless, he added.

An aide to Rep. Sam Johnson (R-Texas) who asked to remain anonymous said Congressional staff appreciate hearing from those who have wrestled with privacy issues and have found solutions. "Privacy is paramount to the importance of healthcare IT, but it's not insurmountable," the aide said. "We can find a way (to) bring our healthcare system into the 21st Century while taking into account privacy and security. "

With regard to arguments by staunch privacy activists, the aide said it is important to look at all sides and work through problems.

"There are very different players out there and patient privacy advocates serve an important role. As Congressional staffers, we can't let the perfect be the enemy of the good. We can have EHR uptake without leaving patient privacy on the wayside. "

The aide predicted this will be a tough year to pass any healthcare IT legislation, but noted there is talk on the Hill of potentially attaching an HIT measure to some sort of healthcare funding bill that would be likely to pass.