Feds Grab for Medical Records

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One of the major features of Bill and Hillary Clinton's nationalized health care plan, which the public rejected in 1994, was giving the Federal Government a database of every American's medical records. Each person was to have a Health Security Card (which Clinton waved for the cameras during his 1994 State of the Union Message) with a "unique identifier number" that would give government bureaucrats easy computer access to everybody's entire medical history.

The Clinton health plan included setting up a National Health Board, responsible only to the President, with extraordinary rulemaking powers to "assure uniformity" and to decide what may and may not be spent on health care, both globally and by each provider. Physicians and other providers were to be required to report every medical service to the national database.

The Card and the database were presented to the public, on the one hand, as each individual's personal key to free health care, and on the other hand, as a means of "health care planning" and of eliminating fraud among providers. The American people, however, easily recognized the Card and the database as bringing an end to medical privacy and as federal control over what health care we would be permitted to receive, with ultimate rationing by bureaucrats or gatekeepers.

Clinton failed to get his nationalized health bill passed in 1994, but he has been progressing toward the same goal incrementally through other legislation. Sometimes the bills are packaged as "for the kids" (e.g., the 1997 Kidcare bill) and sometimes as "stop the fraud" (e.g., the 1996 Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act known as Kennedy-Kassebaum), but the bottom line is to require computerized reporting and to gather more and more information on government databases.

The Kennedy-Kassebaum law requires the Department of Health and Human Services to adopt standards for a "unique health care identifier" for each individual, as well as each employer, provider, and health plan. Everyone will have to submit an identification document with a unique number in order to receive health care, or the provider will not be paid.

The latest bait used by the Clintonian liberals to get all medical records on a federal database is the current drive to set up a federal Immunization Registry that will tag all children at birth and track them until death. This will achieve the original Clinton Administration goal of computerizing the health records of all Americans, with unique personal identifiers (Social Security numbers, if possible), in order to make us conform to government health policy.

The 1993 Comprehensive Child Immunization Act authorized the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) "to establish state registry systems to monitor the immunization status of all children." HHS has since sent $417 million of taxpayers' money to the states to set up these databases, and this money has been supplemented by millions of dollars from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

The 1998 Centers for Disease Control brochure on "Immunization Registries" explains the objective. CDC is "committed to promoting the development and maintenance of computerized registries as a key data resource" that will "fill the information gap" by furnishing the government with "consolidated records," "instant access," and "automated recall notifications."

CDC sees itself as a social change agent, engaging in massive grassroots lobbying (with taxpayers money, of course). The brochure boasts that, following Clinton's personal instructions to the Secretary of Health and Human Services, CDC is working to overcome public opposition. The brochure announces that CDC will be the catalyst "to build political will and consensus" for this health care registry and establish a time line for nationwide registry implementation.

The CDC admits it is working toward "integration of the immunization registry movement with the rapidly developing field of medical informatics, and promoting the inter-operability of registries with other developing medical information systems." Dr. Alan Hinman, former CDC official and now with the Jimmy Carter Presidential Center, stated publicly on May 14: "Immunization registries would be viewed in these settings as merely one aspect of the overall patient information system."

At least half the states have been putting children on state databases, often without their parents' knowledge or consent. Texas legislators discovered that the Texas Department of Health has built up an electronic database of 3.3 million Texas children, based on birth certificates and Social Security numbers, while ignoring the law's requirement for parental consent.

Allowing the government to collect and store personal medical records, and to track us as we move about in our daily lives, puts awesome power in the hands of government bureaucrats. It gives them the power to force us to conform to government health care policy, whether that means mandating that all children

be immunized with an AIDS vaccine when it is put on the market, or mandating that expensive medical treatment must be withheld from seniors.

Once all medical records are computerized with unique identifiers such as Social Security numbers, an instant check system will give all government agencies the power to deny basic services, including daycare, school, college, access to hospital emergency rooms, health insurance, a driver's license, etc., to those who don't conform to government health policies.

Don't be misled by the efforts in Congress to pass so-called privacy legislation that creates hundreds of new crimes and layers of new bureaucracies, supposedly to safeguard against unauthorized disclosure of confidential health information. Tell your Member of Congress that all HHS appropriation bills should forbid the spending of taxpayers' money to collect or coordinate medical information on individuals. Our medical records are none of the government's business.