



# Citizens' Council on Health Care

*A free-market resource for designing the future of health care*

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## **National Physician ID Card Threatens Patient Privacy**

(St. Paul, Minnesota) - A new national health care identification system threatens the privacy of patients, and their access to health care, says Citizens' Council on Health Care (CCHC).

"May 23rd marked the opening day of 'The Enumerator,'" says Twila Brase, president of CCHC. "This is not the name of a new sci-fi movie. It's the name of the latest initiative to advance Big Government health care."

Yesterday, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services began accepting applications for national identification numbers for physicians, dentists, pharmacists, and health care organizations, such as hospitals, nursing homes, pharmacies and group practices. These health care providers must apply to "the Enumerator" for a National Provider ID (NPI) if they transmit health information electronically. All health plans, except the smallest, must use the NPI by May 23, 2007.

"In the age of computers and health care cost containment, a single identification number allows all sorts of bureaucratic mischief," says Brase. "The NPI will enable broad application of coercive strategies now starting to be used by health plans and government agencies: physician profiling, pay-for-performance programs, report cards on physician compliance with HMO-developed and government-endorsed treatment protocols, and financial penalties for non-compliance."

"In other words, the NPI will facilitate off-site control of medical decisions," she says.

In 1996, Congress mandated the implementation of several national health care identification systems, including the NPI, as part of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act. The mandate is part of the Administrative Simplification section of the law. Other requirements include national transaction and code sets, the federal privacy rule, national security standards, a national employer ID number, a national payer ID, and a national patient identification number.

"The so-called federal 'privacy rule' allows widespread sharing of medical record information without patient consent. Once the identification numbers are in place, profiling will become prolific, and patient privacy will be gone," Brase warns.

"A national treatment surveillance system is in the works. Enumeration has been sold as administrative simplification, but its primary purpose will be ongoing disruption of the confidential patient-doctor relationship," she charges.

NPI Website: <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/hipaa/hipaa2/regulations/identifiers/default.asp>

Enumerator: <https://nppes.cms.hhs.gov/NPPES/Welcome.do>

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