

PRESS RELEASE

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HHS Unveils 24/7 Plan to Track Patients

St. Paul, Minnesota—The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services today released \$1.1 billion and a plan to build government health surveillance systems in every state. The stated goal: to enhance public health infrastructure for bioterrorism preparedness. The plan: government access to everyone's medical record through their hospitals and doctor's offices.

"The public was never consulted about this plan. The very idea that government officials plan to get a direct line into the medical records of patients should outrage citizens. Private medical records are not public data," said Twila Brase, R.N., president of Citizens' Council on Health Care (CCHC), a health care policy organization in St. Paul, Minnesota.

State must draw up a plan to present to HHS by no later than April 15, 2002. Sixteen criteria must be part of each state plan, including:

- ?? Timeline for development of a state-wide plan for response to a bioterrorist event, infectious disease outbreak, or other public health emergency.
- ?? Ability to receive and evaluate urgent disease reports from all parts of the jurisdiction on a 24 hour a day, 7 days a week basis.
- ?? Communication systems that provide a 24/7 flow of critical health information between hospital emergency departments, State and local health officials, and law enforcement.

"The HHS plan represents a greater danger to patients than bioterrorism," said Brase. "Just knowing government officials and police officers will receive patient data without patient consent will change the way patients interact with the health care system. They may not tell their doctors the whole story. They may come for care too late. They may receive the wrong diagnoses, the wrong treatment, the wrong advice."

Legislative requirements for meeting HHS criteria were built into the Model Emergency State Health Powers Act released in October by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The Act, now under consideration in all 50 State legislatures, requires ongoing reporting by health care providers and pharmacists to the state public health department. It also permits epidemiological research without patient consent, at both the state and federal level.

"This plan is not just about bioterrorism. HHS officials plan to use patients for medical research without their consent," said Brase. "Public health officials have long expressed a desire to track and tag the entire population. They hope September 11th will make their dreams come true."

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CCHC is an independent non-profit health care policy organization located in St. Paul, Minnesota

