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CCHF Praises Continued Ban on Federal Unique Patient ID

Today’s Appropriation Bill Maintains Longstanding Prohibition

ST. PAUL, Minn.—Citizens’ Council for Health Freedom (CCHF) is pleased that the federal unique patient identifier (UPI) will continue to be prohibited. The bipartisan appropriations bill, which passed today, retains the ban that has been in effect for over 20 years. As industry clamored to lift the ban, CCHF built a nationwide coalition of organizations to keep the ban in place.

“The Unique Patient ID is a national patient-tracking number that would be assigned to Americans without their consent,” said Twila Brase, president of CCHF. “Patient access to care would require the number. In other words, no card, no care. This National Patient ID would be used to create a national medical-records system from which no American could escape, linking together the medical records of all Americans wherever they may be.”

In an effort to stop the UPI from being developed, CCHF briefed staffers of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee, and sent a letter to U.S. Senator Richard Shelby, chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, which was signed by 22 other organizations across the United States.

“The federal UPI would be the final nail in the coffin of patient privacy rights. HIPAA encouraged computerization and eliminated patient consent requirements for most data-sharing. The 2009 HITECH mandate to install and use electronic health records put all patient data in a computerized format for easy sharing. If the National Patient ID was implemented, it would allow all medical records from womb to tomb, to be linked together into a highly-accessible national medical-records system.”

Even with the ban in place for another year, CCHF remains concerned about Congress’s drive to a federally-assigned national patient ID. The manager’s report which is attached to the 2019 appropriations bill, directs the Office of the National Coordinator of Health Information Technology (ONC) to continue to advance a national “patient matching” strategy and provide a report to Congress in 2020 on methods to improve identification of patients.

In February 2019, in response to a Request for Information, CCHF asked the HHS Office for Civil Rights (OCR) to reestablish the patient consent requirements Americans lost under the HIPAA “privacy” rule as the first step to protecting patient privacy rights. The letter emphasized the right of patients to choose with whom
they will share the information in their private medical records, and the right of OCR to restore consent requirements.

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