

Millions Believe Personal Medical Information Has Been Lost or Stolen

*Issue a roadblock to acceptance
of electronic health record systems.*

According to *The Harris Poll*®, four percent or an estimated nine million American adults believe that they or a family member have had confidential personal medical information either lost or stolen. Results of the poll of 2,454 adults surveyed online between June 9 and 16, 2008 by Harris Interactive, which was designed in collaboration with Dr. Alan F. Westin, Professor of Public Law and Government Emeritus at Columbia University, include:

- Among those who have heard about medical records being lost or stolen, seven percent believe that either they (or a family member) may have had their personal medical records lost or stolen. This represents about four percent of all adults and translates into approximately nine million people;¹
- About seven in ten (69%) of adults have either read or heard about medical records with personal health information being lost or stolen from doctor's offices, clinics, hospitals, health insurers, employers or government agencies. The remaining 31 percent have not read or heard about this issue. For over two-thirds of the general public to recall hearing about medical data breaches is a very high topic awareness figure;
- When asked which medical records – computerized or paper – they believe may be lost or stolen most often, just under half (47%) think it is computerized records. About one in six (16%) think that paper records may be lost or stolen most often. Another quarter (23%) think that both computerized and paper records may be lost or stolen about equally;
- Among those who have either heard about medical information being lost or stolen or have had the information lost, the percentage of those who think computerized records are lost most often increase to 51 percent and 54 percent.

So What?

In the past few years a number of healthcare facilities, employers, government agencies or other organizations have acknowledged that confidential personal medical information was stolen or lost. Recent examples of these “medical breaches” include the University of Miami, WellPoint, The National Institutes on Health, the Cleveland Clinic, CVS, J&J Home Health and Baptist Health. Further, the Identity Theft Resource Center (<http://www.idtheftcenter.org/index.html>) reported over 50 breaches from healthcare providers in the first six months of 2008.

¹The US Census Bureau estimates that as of July 1, 2007 there are about 228 million adults aged 18 or over.

Ultimately, while the responses in this poll may not represent actual breaches of medical information, there are a significant number of Americans who believe their personal medical information has been compromised by organizations holding it.

According to Dr. Westin, “For this Harris Poll we were trying to measure perceptions among the public of having suffered a loss or theft of medical records or health information from health-information holders. This is whether or not any outright medical identity theft (use of stolen medical data to obtain valuable medical services) took place. The harms involved in loss or theft of medical records involve not just worries about medical identity theft but also feelings of personal violation and fears of potential misuse or publication of sensitive medical information.”

Table 1
Knowledge of Medical Records Being Lost or Stolen

“Thinking of another topic, in the past year have you read or heard anything about medical records with personal health information being lost or stolen from doctors’ offices, clinics, hospitals, health insurers, employers or government agencies?”

Base: All adults

| | Total |
|-----|-------|
| | % |
| Yes | 69 |
| No | 31 |

Table 2
Have Had Medical Records Lost or Stolen

“To the best of your knowledge, have your medical records or health information, or those of a family member, ever been lost or stolen from an organization that had those records?”

Base: All adults

| | Total Adults* | Total Have Heard about Information Being Lost or Stolen |
|---|---------------|---|
| | % | % |
| Yes, have had medical records lost or stolen (NET) | 4 | 7 |
| Yes, mine | 3 | 5 |
| Yes, both | 1 | 2 |
| Yes, a family member | 2 | 3 |
| No, have not had medical records lost or stolen | 62 | 90 |

*Note: This only adds to 68 percent because this represents those people who have heard about medical information being lost or stolen. The remaining 31 percent are those who have not heard about information being lost or stolen.

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

Table 3
Which Medical Records Lost or Stolen Most Often

“Whether or not you have read or heard about medical records or information being lost or stolen, which form of medical records do you think is lost or stolen most often?”

Base: All adults

| | Total | Heard about Medical Information Being Lost or Stolen | | Have had Medical Information Lost or Stolen | |
|---|-------|--|----|---|----|
| | | Yes | No | Yes | No |
| | % | % | % | % | % |
| Computerized medical records | 47 | 51 | 39 | 54 | 50 |
| Paper and computerized medical records are lost or stolen about equally | 23 | 25 | 18 | 26 | 25 |
| Paper medical records | 16 | 15 | 17 | 12 | 16 |
| Not sure | 14 | 9 | 26 | 8 | 9 |

Methodology

This Harris Poll was conducted online within the United States between June 9 and 16, 2008, among 2,454 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents’ propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words “margin of error” as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in the Harris Interactive panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

Healthcare News

8 | Volume
7 | Issue
July 30
2008

About Harris Interactive

Harris Interactive is a global leader in custom market research. With a long and rich history in multimodal research, powered by our science and technology, we assist clients in achieving business results. Harris Interactive serves clients globally through our North American, European and Asian offices and a network of independent market research firms. For more information, please visit www.harrisinteractive.com.

To Subscribe

Please visit www.harrisinteractive.com/newsletters

For more information, please contact us at:

877.919.4765

or visit our healthcare webpage at

www.harrisinteractive.com/healthcare

Media inquiries, contact:

Sarah Craig 585.214.7059

scraig@harrisinteractive.com

©2008, Harris Interactive Inc. All rights reserved. Other product and/or company names used herein are trademarks of their respective owners.