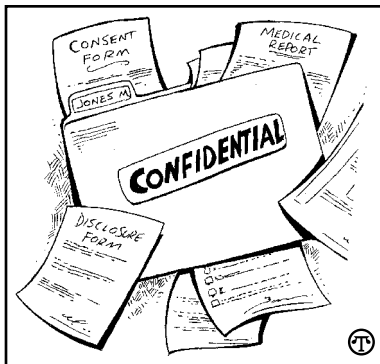


HEALTH NEWS

Debating Patient Privacy

(NAPSA)—The outcome of a current debate in Washington may determine what groups gain access to your personal medical information.



Many groups feel the laws determining a patient's right to privacy should be more strict.

The American Psychiatric Association (APA) says that the government should not delay activation in 2003 of a new federal privacy regulation, despite several major weaknesses. "Any delay in the implementation date is contrary to the health needs of the American people," says Paul S. Appelbaum, M.D., APA president-elect.

The APA says the new regulation provides unprecedented protection for individual medical records, but contains some weaknesses. By signing the new blanket consent forms, patients would agree to subsequent disclosure of their records without knowing what information would be revealed or who would have access to it.

Fundraisers for health facilities could use the names of well-known patients in fundraising campaigns without the patient's permission. The rule would also allow law enforcement agencies to explore private patient records without adequate safeguards.

The APA believes these problems can be fixed after the regulation takes effect. "Patients receiving treatment for mental disorders are at particular risk of being exploited by the current system," says Dr. Appelbaum.

For more information, visit www.psych.org.