



THE STOUFFER REPORT

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For Immediate Release:
Nov. 30, 2005

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Health-care Record Keeping Needs to Step into 21st Century

Every 3,000 miles we change the oil in our cars. Large service station chains such as Jiffy Lube even send reminders in the mail when its time to get serviced. Their record keeping is current with the times. Unfortunately, health-care providers do not keep comparable records.

Take for instance a Hurricane Katrina evacuee from New Orleans pulling into a Jiffy Lube station in Texas. Attendants know exactly when his or her oil was last changed, if any additional services have been provided in the past, and even if the carpets had been cleaned.

On the other hand, that same person cannot go to any local health-care provider and find out when his or her last tetanus shot took place. No one would have a clue. Medical records aren't accessible by computer or by any type of database system. If the individual is on Medicaid or another state-sponsored program, significant records would still be difficult to find.

Many people wear a bracelet or necklace stating what medicines cause an allergic reaction. We go over our medical history every time we switch doctors or are referred to a specialist. Wouldn't it be nice if doctors or other emergency personnel already knew your medical history no matter where you are in the United States?

We have come to a point where health-care providers are 20 years behind the times. One could easily blame doctors, hospitals, and others for not working together to create an efficient, streamlined database system. However, the state and federal governments have failed to set this precedent even in their own insurance systems.

I have written before that our state's Medicaid system is obsolete. The computer purchased to run information is a 1978 model. I wouldn't feel safe running my business on technology that old, let alone trusting my life to it.

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The state has no idea how many emergency visits someone makes in one night, bouncing from one emergency room to the next to frequently collect prescriptions. We don't share information from one provider to another, possibly because we haven't put together a system good enough to transfer data including X-rays and other imaging. Maybe its time we considered such an investment.

The time has come where technology has provided us with many conveniences, and the quick and inexpensive data-sharing is one of them. If the free market has provided this type of system for oil changes, I hope we can all agree the time has come to make these types of reforms to our health-care industry.

Of course, privacy and protection of data is of the utmost importance in creating a system that is useful. There aren't many things more private than our own health histories—so severe penalties for misuse must be established. To bring our health-care industry into the 21st century, improving the efficiency and effectiveness of our record-keeping is a must.

If you have any questions about this or any other issue, please feel free to contact my office toll free at (866) 768-3987 or by email bstouffer@senate.mo.gov.

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