

Combating Medical Identity Theft

Medical identity theft—the misuse of a person’s name or insurance information to obtain healthcare—is emerging as a problem with serious implications for consumers, government, and the healthcare industry. As the nation moves toward the increased use of electronic health records, industry experts anticipate that occurrences of medical identity theft will rise dramatically.

As part of a research and analysis project, Booz Allen Hamilton worked with the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC) to gain a better understanding of the scope of the medical identity theft problem and to develop a set of next steps to tackle an issue that has the potential to endanger patients’ lives. Our industry-experienced staff members helped health officials gain a comprehensive understanding of medical identity theft and consider solutions that can be integrated into systems, operating procedures, and training in support of electronic health information exchange.

Medical Identity Theft: Motives and Consequences

Medical identity thieves have many motives. Lacking healthcare coverage or the money to pay for care out-of-pocket, a thief may steal another medical

identity to receive treatment. A friend or family member may use their own identity to help an uninsured patient. Criminals may steal medical records to obtain drugs for resale or pose as a physician to bill insurers for fictional services.

Victims of identity theft face serious financial problems if they are hit with medical bills for services they never received. When they become ill, they may discover that their health benefits have been exhausted. Medical identity theft can also result in false reports of pre-existing conditions that make it difficult for victims to renew or receive healthcare coverage. At its worst, medical identity theft can result in injury or death if physicians use incorrect medical records to guide treatment.

Prevention, Detection, and Remediation: Outlining Effective Strategies

To help ONC address the challenges posed by medical identity theft, Booz Allen drew on its expertise in healthcare, policy, and privacy and security to conduct an initial environmental scan exploring the problem. Booz Allen staff attended conferences, performed a wide-ranging literature review, and met with thought leaders. Ultimately, more than 30 providers, payors, consumer advocates, and government officials provided insights.

In addition, 450 attendees engaged in productive dialogues and panel discussions about medical identity theft challenges during a one-day town hall meeting staged by Booz Allen in Washington, DC.

Based on outcomes from both the environmental scan and the town hall meeting, our staff members delivered a detailed report to ONC that presented next steps for the prevention, detection, and remediation of medical identity theft. Developed in collaboration with HHS, the report outlines a host of potential solutions, including technical remedies, consumer education and awareness, and policy change.

Among other findings, the report emphasized that a campaign against medical identity theft will require new business processes and technology, along with privacy and security protections. According to the analysis, consideration should be given to the benefits of abandoning current business silos and creating new mechanisms for collaboration in the prevention, detection, and remediation of medical identity theft. And, perhaps most importantly, the report highlighted the advantages of a national, standardized effort to thwart medical identity theft as government and health technology experts work to build more robust healthcare information systems.

Helping HHS Be Ready for What's Next

As the use and exchange of electronic health information grows, Booz Allen stands ready to help HHS build on the recommendations provided to ONC and continue raising awareness about medical

identity theft among consumers, healthcare plans, and law enforcement and medical professionals alike. In addition, stakeholders will begin using technology strategically in the near future to identify risks and to alert consumers, payors, and providers to instances of medical identity theft. As those advances occur, Booz Allen will be strongly positioned to help stakeholders leverage technology tools for reviewing transactional records and detecting inconsistencies, from records of treatments for chronic conditions not previously diagnosed, to increases in prescription usage, to attempts to receive care far from an individual's home.

Ready to Help You

At its core, medical identity theft is a violation of consumer trust. With our proven analytical approach to reviewing and detecting inconsistencies in transactional records, plus our extensive experience with federal agencies—from the Federal Trade Commission, Social Security Administration, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Office of the Inspector General, and Department of Justice to organizations in the intelligence and financial arenas—we can help government and other stakeholders build systems and processes to maintain or restore that trust. To learn more about how Booz Allen can help your agency ensure the highest levels of security and privacy protection for your consumers and be ready for what's next, visit www.boozallen.com.

contact: Susan Penfield, Vice President
e-mail: penfield_susan@bah.com
phone: 240/314-5505

contact: Ilene Yarnoff, Principal
e-mail: yarnoff_ilene@bah.com
phone: 703/917-2574

contact: Denise Tauriello, Senior Associate
e-mail: tauriello_denise@bah.com
phone: 301/838-3666