

# Privacy Act leads to Paper Sacks

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e've been looking the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act over very carefully. We took an impromptu survey of our patients to ascertain their interest and understanding of the issues involved. The mandatory dozen pages of fine print explaining exactly what those issues are were initially met with wooden incomprehension. The Legalese-to-English Conversion pamphlet's explanation proved to be invaluable, however, giving the evening office cleanup crew something useful to do.

I know we are not alone in our appreciation of a beneficent government that devotes so much time and money dedicated to furthering our best interests. The typical response from patients has been an enthusiastic, "Huh?"

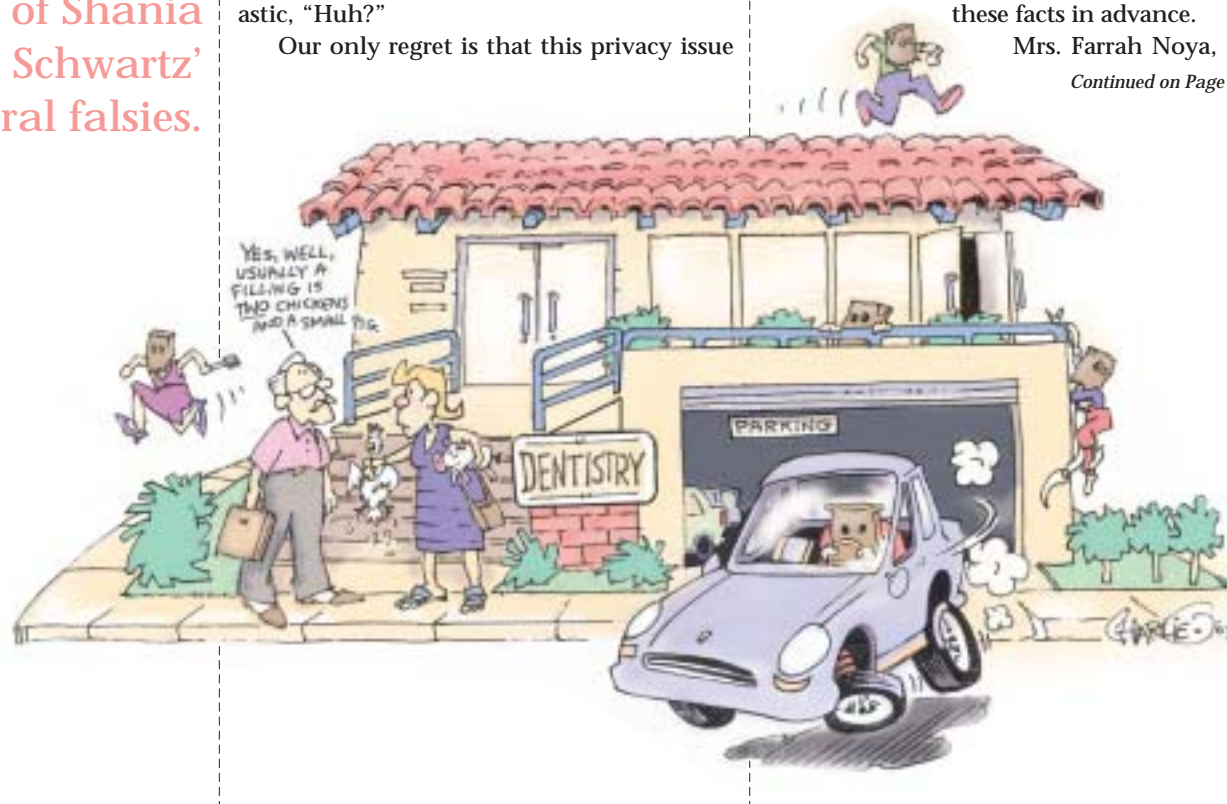
Our only regret is that this privacy issue

took so long to be addressed. Years ago, two patients genetically programmed to hate each other on sight, met quite by accident in our reception room. When this encounter left the area frigid enough in which to hang meat, we realized privacy had become our top priority next to departing the premises at 5 p.m.

An ensuing incident clinched our decision. It had been our custom over the years to tape a day sheet to the operatory wall indicating who was scheduled and what the appointment was for. Not liking surprises, this precluded demanding the seated patient to state clearly who she was and what she wanted, a request that annoyed some people who unreasonably felt we should have known these facts in advance.

Mrs. Farrah Noya, age

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47, height 5 feet 6½ inches, weight 149, chemically processed hair and with other possible surgical enhancements, noticed the day sheet upon dismissal. At 10:45 a.m., according to the sheet, a certain Shania Schwartz, divorcee, age 39 (unconfirmed), height 5 feet 4.5 inches, weight 124 (also unconfirmed), 36-26-48 (ha!), usually encased in a Kmart knockoff frock and Revlon's entire line of cosmetics, was due to have a lower cast partial seated.

In what we now acknowledge as a blatant breach of privacy, the day sheet plainly stated: 10:45, Schwartz, Shania, seat PLD. Espying this, Mrs. Noya blanched, clutched her bosom as if in cardiac arrest and visibly shaken, fled the office without pausing at the front desk for her free sample of Listerine's FreshBurst PocketPak.

Within 48 hours, everybody in town knew of Shania Schwartz' oral falsies, the grapevine extending as far away as Nebraska. As a result, the following transpired:

1. Ms. Schwartz, privacy compromised beyond salvation, left town hurriedly, leaving no forwarding address. Her family believes she was headed for McMurdo Station, Antarctica, because she took her mukluks and a change of Victoria's Secret thermal briefs with her.

2. Our office, fearing litigation of

monumental proportions, immediately implemented comprehensive privacy strictures. The Schwartz records were expunged from our files; her new partial was destroyed, observing meticulously all EPA, OSHA, FBI and HIPAA rules involving disposal of prosthetic appliances, metal/acrylic, vol. 9, sect. 4 application 32 between 0345 and 1610 Zulu.

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Patients upon dismissal are issued a paper sack with eyeholes to wear while they descend to the parking lot via a fire pole installed adjacent to the chair. They are instructed not to return home for 48 hours and then by a circuitous route, speaking to no one in transit.

Our staff now speaks only in whispers using a code devised by Navaho Indians. The day sheet looks like this:

XXXX a.m., XXXX, Mr. XXXX

Electronic submission of claims, which held so much promise initially but evolved into a veritable blabbermouth of privacy invasions, has gone by the board.

We are presently using a barter system, negotiating our services for usable items like quilts, costume jewelry, and the occasional chicken or small pig.

NOTE: All of the above is to be held in the strictest confidence and should you reveal the contents thereof, you will be terminated (HIPAA, p. 93, vol. 7, line 16).

**CDA**