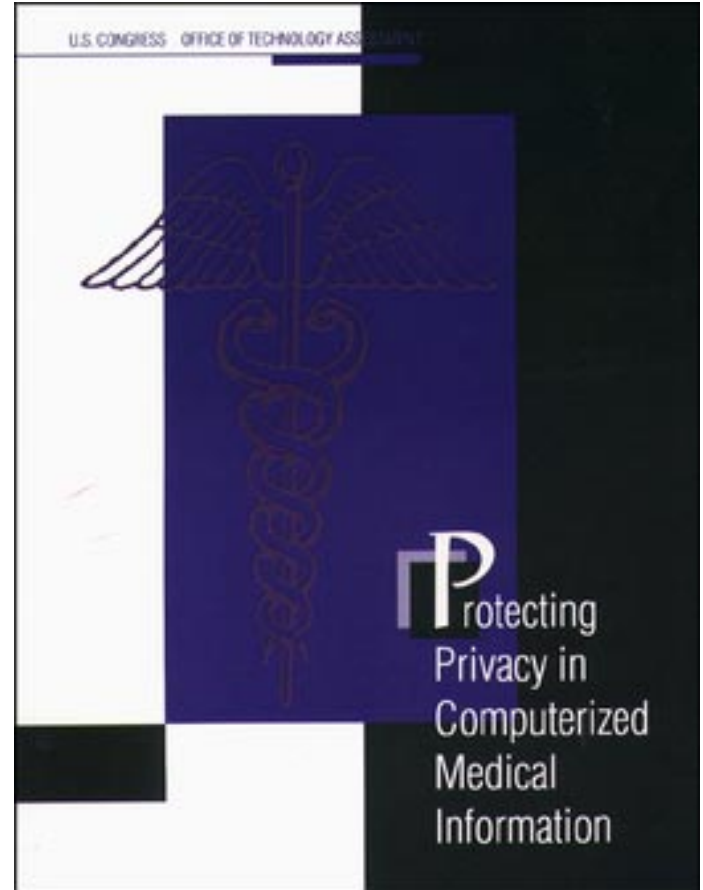


*Protecting Privacy in Computerized  
Medical Information*

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# Foreword

The Clinton administration's health care reform proposal, announced by the President on September 22, 1993, places substantial reliance on telecommunications and information technology to reduce costs and improve health care delivery. By linking computerized health information through a national network, the proposal envisions a system that would allow an efficient exchange of information to improve patient care and expand resources for medical research and education, while lowering health care costs. While automation may or may not achieve these goals, it will raise serious questions about individual privacy and proper use of the health care information system. This report analyzes the implications of computerized medical information and the challenges it brings to individual privacy.

In its analysis, the report examines: 1) the nature of the privacy interest in health care information and the current state of the law protecting that information; 2) the nature of proposals to computerize health care information and the technologies available to both computerize and protect privacy in the information; and 3) models for protection of health care information.

This study was requested by the Senate Subcommittee on Federal Services, Post Office, and Civil Service, and the House Subcommittee on Government Information, Justice, and Agriculture. The Subcommittees asked the assistance of the Office of Technology Assessment in confronting the issue of confidentiality of health care information in a fully automated medical environment. OTA drew upon the contribution of participants at two workshops, and received valuable assistance from officials of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the National Institute of Standards and Technology, the French Ministry of Health and the European Economic Community, as well as a broad range of individuals and professional organizations from the medical community, public interest groups, industry, and academia.

OTA appreciates the participation of the advisory panelists, workshop participants, Federal agency officials, and interested citizens, without whose help this report would not have been possible. The report itself, however, is the sole responsibility of OTA.



Roger C. Herdman, Director

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**NOTE:** OTA appreciates and is grateful for the valuable assistance and thoughtful critiques provided by the workshop participants. The workshop participants do not, however, necessarily approve, disapprove, or endorse this background paper. OTA assumes full responsibility for the background paper and the accuracy of its contents.

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