

# Excerpts from President Bush's Speech

## April 27, 2004

The 21st century health care system is using a 19th century paperwork system. Doctors use paper files to keep tracks of their patients. Pharmacists have to figure out the handwriting of a doctor. (Laughter and applause.) Vital medical information is scattered in many places. X-rays get misplaced. Problems with drug interaction are not systematically checked. See, these old methods of keeping records are real threats to patients and their safety and are incredibly costly. Modern technology hasn't caught up with a major aspect of health care and we've got to change that. We've got to change it....

The system is antiquated; it is old. They should have personal electronic medical files available that accurately and securely keep a patient's medical history, and in Elizabeth's case, her treatments. In other words, medicine ought to be using modern technologies in order to better share information, in order to reduce medical errors, in order to reduce cost to our health care system by billions of dollars. To protect patients and improve care and reduce cost, we need a system where everyone has their own personal electronic medical record that they control and they can give a doctor when they need to.

And so you say, how do we do this? Well, first you set a goal. Within ten years, every American must have a personal electronic medical record. That's a good goal for the country to achieve. The federal government has got to take the lead in order to make this happens by developing what's called technical standards. In other words, there needs to be standards. As you know, docs talk, like, different languages in different offices and there needs to be -- in order to have uniformity, there needs to be standards available, and it's a good role for the federal government, that will allow medical records such as x-rays and lab tests to be stored and sent electronically.

So step one is to set the standards. And we've done good work and we'll try to finish the standards by the end of this year. I say we -- it's the Department of Health and Human Services that are involved with this important project. We've set out money to encourage demonstration projects that will show the health care providers the need to use electronics to make their records system more modern.

As well, there's the senior department that we've announced today at the Department of Health and Human Services to coordinate these efforts with hospitals and medical groups. In other words, a proper role for the government is to take the lead in this case. And after all, we should; we spend enormous amounts of money in the health care field. I mean, we're a large provider -- spender for health care: Medicare, Medicaid, Veterans' benefits, employee benefits. And so the federal government must create the incentives for health care providers involved with the federal government to use medical records, and in doing so, will go a long way toward introducing IT, information technology, into a part of medicine that desperately needs it.

As we do so, I want to repeat what I said earlier. Patients will have control over their privacy. I fully understand there's a issue of privacy. And the people who ought to determine the extent of privacy, their privacy, of course, is the patient, the consumer. (Applause.)