

# Medical Informatics Website Tracks IT Failures

*20/20 hindsight illuminates what not to do when you're implementing large IT projects.*

**A**S IN CHILD WELFARE, IT EXPERTS IN the medical field walk a minefield of difficulties on the path to interoperability. In fact, on his website, Drexel University faculty member and informatics expert Scot Silverstein, M.D., provides nearly 50 case studies of how IT projects can go wrong.

Quoting a New England Journal of Medicine article (NEJM 359:50-60), Silverstein says on his website, "... diffusion of clinical information technology, after 30-plus years of effort and billions of dollars spent, remains limited. As per the statistics in the NEJM article, just four percent of physicians in the U.S. reported having a basic system. Most hospitals are also lacking the technology to any meaningful extent.

"This website is concerned with the reasons for this apparent paradox."

Two examples of IT failures from Silverstein's site are highlighted below. For more case studies of what not to do when planning for large IT projects, visit Silverstein's website at [www.ischool.drexel.edu/faculty/ssilverstein/failurecases/?loc=home](http://www.ischool.drexel.edu/faculty/ssilverstein/failurecases/?loc=home).

## **Georgia Blue Cross Suffers Data Privacy Breach**

Poor system testing caused a medical records privacy breach at Georgia Blue Cross and Blue Shield when more than 200,000 Explanation of Benefit (EOB) letters were mailed to the wrong addresses. EOBs often include protected health or personal information.

One affected customer said, "When we lived without computers, you had to break into an office and then a locked file cabinet. It was much harder to steal information. With the internet now, anyone can get any information they want, regardless of privacy issues, and this proves it."

## **Australia's E-Health Progress Creeps Along**

Progress on Australia's e-health initiative garnered mixed reviews this fall. Professionals close to the project, including Health Department Secretary Jane Halton, believe that e-health is nearing completion. Others strongly disagree. Health Minister Nicola Roxon says that lingering security issues remain and money is not being used to maximum benefit.

The Health Department has been working toward the first version of universal health records, which would be available in the short to mid-term, according to Halton. "People will start to see the benefits of the investment and the tangible difference it makes in the near future. Until now a lot of e-health has been invisible to patients. We are close in making e-health fully accessible to all."

Roxon continues to believe in the project, citing a report by the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care that indicates 187 cases of mistaken identity in private and public hospitals in 2006-2007. Operations, X-rays, and other procedures were executed on the wrong people and body parts. "Better management of health information and the systems to support it are fundamental to enhance primary care delivery," according to Roxon.

Still, Roxon says, progress on the project remains slow. As an example, in 2007-2008, only 42.5 million of the \$53.8 million e-health allocation has been spent. She fears that e-health is simply slipping through the cracks.