



May 17, 2006

Hon. Joe Barton  
Chairman  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building  
U.S. House of Representatives

Hon. John D. Dingell  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
2322 Rayburn House Office Building  
U.S. House of Representatives

Hon. Nathan Deal  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Health  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building  
U.S. House of Representatives

Hon. Sherrod Brown  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Health  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
2322 Rayburn House Office Building  
U.S. House of Representatives

Dear Chairman Barton, Ranking Member Dingell, Chairman Deal, and Ranking Member Brown:

On behalf of Trust for America's Health (TFAH), a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to saving lives, protecting the health of every community and making disease prevention a national priority, I write to urge you to consider public health needs as you develop legislation to establish electronic medical records (EMR) and a national health information infrastructure. A national EMR system represents an opportunity to radically alter America's public health data acquisition, information, and research capabilities. Strengthening these public health fundamentals should be a top priority in the formation of such a system.

TFAH makes the following recommendations to fully realize this once-in a generation opportunity to advance our understanding of the public's health:

- 1) **One Set of National Standards** – The federal government should establish or facilitate the establishment of a single set of standards to assure the interoperability of data for public health analysis. This would dramatically further research into causes and cures of disease by allowing for the study of health trends and factors that influence people's health. The current public health surveillance system provides an example of problems that arise from a lack of common standards as it is built on a series of different data systems, which has severely limited both local and national analysis for improving population health.
- 2) **Public Health Data Collection** – Data collection provided for in legislation should not be limited to quality of health care delivery. An electronic medical record system should be able to provide data for tracking of infectious and chronic diseases, preparing and

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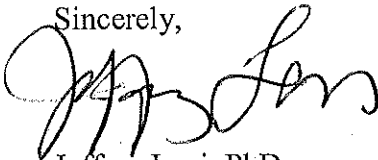
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planning for possible threats and disaster response, and for use in health services research. This would increase the value of an electronic medical record system to address both individual health needs and a community's health needs.

- 3) **Access by Public Health Officials** – While it is critical to protect the privacy of patients, it is essential that appropriate public health officials have access to data to conduct critical public health functions, including disease tracking. This would allow epidemiologists to correlate health conditions with variables such as environment, job hazards, family patterns, preventive measures, and personal habits, such as smoking and diet.

If done correctly EMRs provide an opportunity to collect information about the health of Americans in a systematic, coordinated, and global manner, which could dramatically improve our national community's health. TFAH looks forward to working with you to make this a reality. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Richard Hamburg at (202) 223-9876 or Jeremy Sharp at (202) 223-9870 x203.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey Levi, PhD  
Executive Director