

Fred Buhr: County must do more to protect seniors' health info

Story

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Fred Buhr | Posted: Friday, September 10, 2010 4:40 am

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Dear Editor: In her recent column, Barbara Quirk quoted Robert Blancato, coordinator of the Elder Justice Coalition, as saying, "Rep. Baldwin in one of the foremost champions of elder justice in Congress." Blancato was referring to House passage of Rep. Tammy Baldwin's bill to counter crimes against seniors. From my perspective as an older American, Baldwin is my champion.

On the other hand, other local and national aging network leaders fall short in their responsibilities as advocates since they ignore the blatant and egregious violations of patient privacy (HIPAA) laws by area agencies on aging, state units on aging and the federal Administration on Aging.

As the prime example, the Area Agency on Aging of Dane County requires all senior centers to utilize the Social Assistance Management System. SAMS is a Web-based application hosted on AgingNetwork.com, owned by Harmony Information Systems of Reston, Va. (I am the volunteer data entry operator for the McFarland Senior Outreach program, which operates meal sites in McFarland and Cambridge.)

Because of the failure of Dane County AAA to institute HIPAA-required security provisions, Dane County potentially could be subject to millions of dollars in penalties for HIPAA violations. But at an even more costly level, Dane County AAA might be the Internet gateway that permits systemic fraud accounting for billions of dollars of fraudulent payments related to medical identity theft.

September is Senior Center Month. It should be the month for Dane County and the nationwide aging network to review compliance with HIPAA rules and regulations. Details of my efforts over the past three years to inform agencies of the need to take remedial action can be found on my website:

<http://www.metasteward.net>.

Fred Buhr

McFarland