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PRIVACY

Guarding medical secrets, at a cost

[Picture Omitted In Printing]

Doctors are withholding medical information from health records, and even lying, to help patients protect their privacy. In a new survey of 344 members of the Association of American Physicians and Surgeons, 87 percent reported that patients had asked them to exclude data from their records, and 78 percent had complied. Nearly one fifth admitted to making false entries.

Mark Schiller, a San Francisco Bay area psychiatrist and member of the AAPS board of directors, says that because of privacy concerns, he only takes basic notes about patients' condition and medications. Yet an incomplete or distorted record poses its own risks. He says he unnecessarily prescribed anti-psychotic medications to patients who had not divulged their cocaine or crystal meth habits. "I now have to balance privacy concerns with the need to communicate with other physicians," says Schiller.

— *Dana Hawkins*
