

Data Breaches Hit Medical Providers Hard this Week

June 5, 2019 - I absolutely hate going to see a new doctor. You have to show up early, and of course there is all of that pesky paperwork for first time patients. But the thing I dislike the most is the fact that the forms they have you fill out always seem to ask for your Social Security Number. How that would be relevant to any diagnosis is beyond me, and I never provide that information. But a surprising number of people do. Within the past week, there have been enough significant medical data breaches that consumers really need to rethink the idea of complying with their doctors' requests for SSNs.

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Quest Diagnostics has announced a data breach involving information on more than 12 million patients. Right on the heels of that announcement, LabCorp - a company that screens blood tests - announced a breach involving 7.7 million patients. The two breaches were significantly different when it comes to the data exposed however.

In LabCorp's announcement, the company said that neither insurance numbers or SSNs were stored by the company; meaning that this information wasn't released. But in the case of Quest Diagnostics, SSNs were included in the data breach along with credit card payment information.

There is no doubt that damage occurred to the customers of both companies, but there is equally little doubt that the damage caused by the Quest Diagnostics breach was far greater than that caused by LabCorp.

We're not trying to come down harder on one company than another. Data breaches have become a fact of life that everyone needs to deal with, including consumers filling out forms. Nobody should feel forced to give up their SSN in order to get medical treatment. I've never been refused treatment for refusing to provide my SSN, and the chances are that if a doctor did make such a demand, I'd walk out and find another doctor. The same goes for a testing lab.

byJim Malmberg

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