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Computer Viruses Infecting Medical Equipment Pose Security Threats and HIPAA Compliance Challenges

A [recent article](#) discussing a meeting of the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) [Information Security & Privacy Advisory Board](#) (Board) states that participants reported that computerized hospital equipment is increasingly vulnerable to malware infections. The article notes that Board participants believe that conventional malware is rampant in hospitals. In addition to the serious functional concerns identified in the article, it should be noted that this also highlights a significant HIPAA compliance problem.

Under the HIPAA Security Regulations, covered entities must establish procedures for guarding against, detecting, and reporting malicious software. Further, under the Security Regulations technical safeguards, covered entities must (1) implement policies and procedures to protect electronic protected health information from improper alteration or destruction, (2) implement electronic mechanisms to corroborate that electronic protected health information has not been altered or destroyed in an unauthorized manner, and (3) implement security measures to ensure that electronically transmitted electronic protected health information is not improperly modified without detection until disposed of.

Malware affecting medical equipment may impact all of these requirements. Hospitals and health systems should be aware of the threats of computer viruses and take the necessary steps required to ensure HIPAA compliance in dealing with those threats.

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