Not One Word on Hit Failures?

I am disappointed in the content of Computer’s November special issue on the move toward electronic health records as it pertains to topics such as EMRs and PHRs. An uninformed reader could come away thinking that the only failures of concern for these systems lie in the realm of security and privacy.

The article did not contain one reference to the IOM report titled “Health IT and Patient Safety: Building Safer Systems for Better Care” (www.iom.edu/Reports/2011/Health-IT-and-Patient-Safety-Building-Safer-Systems-for-Better-Care/Report-Brief.aspx), including any of the types of problems or issues it describes nor its recommendations for addressing them. There was nothing describing how difficult it is to get information about HIT failures or about the conflict about whether or not EMRs should be classified as medical devices. I would think members of a professional engineering society would be at least as interested in that information as well as the implementation and validation of required functionality.

I suggest that Computer should at least request the authors of the IOM report to provide an article for publication (soon) that takes a broad look at the safety-related concerns associated with the deployment of HIT.

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The guest editor’s response:

As the guest editor of the special issue on the move toward electronic health records, I used a call-for-papers approach to determine its content. Because the CFP emphasized the topics of security and privacy, most of the submissions addressed these topics.

The CFP was posted on Computer’s website, submitted to public and private health IT listservs, and posted on network security distribution lists for more than six months. In addition, although it resulted in generating only one submission, I personally contacted individuals who have made visible and significant contributions in this area.

The bottom line is that it’s only possible to publish a small subset of submitted papers. The six-article limit on cover features for a special issue can’t possibly cover all topics within the realm of a broad subject area such as electronic health records, which encompasses diverse contributing disciplines. However, I anticipate that future special issues will address other subtopics of this most critical foundation of the Affordable Care Act.

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Videotex Revisited

I was pleasantly surprised to see the short excerpt from the 1980 videotex article in the 32 & 16 Years Ago column in Computer’s December 2012 issue (pp. 16-17).

I was active in the videotex arena at that time, working in New York supporting the US role in Prestel International, and later served on the initial board of directors of the Videotex Industry Association.

The Web has so completely accomplished just about everything once envisioned for videotex that no memory of videotex seems to remain. In fact, I have been thinking about writing a critique of videotex as “the Web that wasn’t,” but I have doubts about whether anybody cares. Or, to put it another way, is there anything to be learned from the story of what happened to videotex?

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We welcome your letters. Send them to letters@computer.org. Letters are subject to editing for style, clarity, and length.