

June 7, 1999

Honorable Bill Frist
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions

428 Dirksen Senate Office Building

Washington, DC 20510-6300

Dear Senator Frist:

The American College of Physicians-American Society of Internal Medicine (ACP-ASIM), representing more than 120,000 internal medicine physicians and medical students, appreciates your efforts to improve the research provisions of the Health Information Confidentiality Act of 1999. We commend your bipartisan effort to facilitate medical research and, at the same time, protect patients' confidentiality rights.

Recognizing that the Chairman's Mark may change prior to the scheduled mark-up on June 9th, we are encouraged that the May 21st draft achieves a balance between protecting patients' confidentiality rights and the public's interest in continuing quality research.

As is the case with all clinicians, our members who are involved in research must use, and many times share, medical information in the course of their research. The current agreement recognizes this critically important activity by removing language contained in earlier drafts that would have created additional layers of oversight and bureaucracy. In addition, we are supportive of the definition of "nonidentifiable information," that includes data that is coded, encrypted and otherwise made anonymous and that the use of this data does not raise confidentiality concerns.

ACP-ASIM supports the enactment of strong patients' confidentiality protections. Your efforts to forge a bipartisan agreement on this legislation – and in particular on the medical research provisions – demonstrates your strong leadership on this issue. We look forward to working with you and your staff to further strengthen the bill as it moves through the legislative process.

Sincerely,

Robert B. Doherty
Vice President, Government Affairs and Public Policy