

Pumped Up

By Reg P. Wydeven
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One important aspect of elder law is house calls. Some clients, due to illness, injury or other reasons, have a hard time getting out. For these folks, I'm happy to come out and see them. I'm very fortunate to be invited into many clients' homes to help with their legal issues.

In addition to discussing wills and powers of attorney, I am almost always given a quick tour. I love to see pictures of kids, grandkids and sometimes great-grandkids, plastering the walls. I have seen gorgeous homes with modern makeovers and updated kitchens. I have also felt like I stepped backward in time visiting homes with console TVs resting on olive shag carpeting next to kitchens with marigold appliances and wallpaper.

I get to check out clients' collections of Precious Moments, beer steins and Franklin Mint plates. Sometimes I even get cookies. And I'm almost always lucky enough to get hugs.

Sometimes house calls, however, don't go quite so well. I've had dogs jump on me. I've had babies spit up on me. I've accidentally knocked over knickknacks. I've gotten into heated debates with a client about his Chicago Bears fandom and collection of memorabilia.

But the pinnacle of my epic dorkdom was the time I accidentally stood on a client's oxygen hose during our conversation. Thankfully, I didn't cause any harm by cutting off his air supply.

While my blunder with medical equipment was completely inadvertent, some medical devices could be intentionally tampered with.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the Department of Homeland Security recently issued a joint statement that "strongly encourages" medical facilities to stop using Hospira's Symbiq Infusion System. Government officials learned that the system, which consists of a pump that continuously delivers a patient's medication over an extended period of time, can be tampered with by computer hackers.

Hospira confirmed that the computerized pump can be remotely accessed through a hospital's network. So unlike my goof with the oxygen hose, motivated individuals could intentionally wreak havoc by hacking into the device and changing the dosage of medication the pump administers.

Thankfully, the hacks have just been theoretical, as there have been no reports of any unauthorized access to the infusion pumps. While Hospira stopped making the device in 2013 for unrelated reasons, the pumps can still be purchased from other various outlets. Hospira strongly discourages the purchase of the pumps from these third parties and is even working with the FDA to remedy any breaches and issue warnings about any additional risks or cybersecurity threats.

In fact, the company released a statement saying, "After evaluating reported vulnerabilities, we are communicating with customers at the limited number of sites where Symbiq remains in use...to deploy an update to the pump configuration to close access ports and put additional cybersecurity protections in place."

I'm relieved Hospira is working to fix this problem. With me standing on patients' hoses, the last thing they need is someone else tampering with their health.

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