

BY GREGORY PHILLIPS : The Herald-Sun
gphillips@heraldsun.com
Aug 4, 2006 : 8:36 pm ET



DURHAM -- Fourth District Rep. David Price, D-N.C., came to town Friday to weigh in on federal efforts to computerize records and communications in the health-care industry, moves that are anathema to many privacy advocates.

Price met with representatives of health-care providers and insurance companies at the American Tobacco Campus offices of Covisint Compuware where he said plenty of wrinkles remain to be

worked out before such legislation would pass Congressional muster.

Covisint, a network set up by auto companies as a way of securely communicating sensitive information, bought Durham-based ProviderLink earlier this year. ProviderLink provides information technology services for the health-care industry throughout the state. Covisint, now a subsidiary of the nation's ninth largest computer software company, Compuware, hopes to replicate its auto industry successes in the health-care field.

Detroit-based Compuware is owned by Peter Karmanos, who also owns the Stanley Cup champion Carolina Hurricanes hockey team.

Covisint vice president Brett Furst said the company wants to offer services that will allow health-care providers to speed up care, locate hospital beds more quickly and save money by improving discharge planning. Simplicity is another consideration.

"You can't make it a science project to get into it," Furst said.

Price said the House and Senate have each passed different plans to encourage more electronic communications in health care, but several issues remain unresolved, with patient privacy at the top of the list.

"Those things are not as near resolution as they should be," he said.

Harry Reynolds, a Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina executive, said companies want to see legislation incorporate electronic prescription programs that have already been successful.

Studies have shown that poor penmanship on handwritten physician prescriptions for patients is responsible for myriad errors in the filling of those prescriptions and that

electronic prescription communication between physician and pharmacist eliminates many of those errors.

"Let's do things that are making a difference," he said.

While updating the group on other health-related issues in Washington, Price, a Chapel Hill Democrat, leapt into another fray to sound off on Republican President George W. Bush's veto of a bill that would have loosened restrictions on federally-funded embryonic stem cell research.

"The idea that the ideology of small, willful groups could stand in the way of [embryonic stem cell research] should enrage every American," he said.

<http://www.herald-sun.com/>