

# Out of the Breach

Reduce the risk of litigation and build confidence in data handling by becoming a privacy champion.

By Rita Zeidner

New employees attending orientation at Atlantic General Hospital in Berlin, Md., barely have time to gulp down their first cups of coffee before Jim Brannon begins talking about privacy.

The human resource chief at the 51-bed hospital serving the mostly rural population on Maryland's Eastern Shore, Brannon begins a cautionary tale that hits home with his mostly female audience: At another small hospital a decade ago, he recalls, an irate patient called to complain that an employee had approached her in a group at church and congratulated her on being pregnant. The problem: The mother-to-be hadn't told her friends and family.

"This is a small town. People talk, and they want to be caring," Brannon told two dozen new employees last May. "But that doesn't mean they don't deserve privacy."

The stakes are high for a hospital where an indiscretion by a single loose-lipped employee

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*The author is senior writer for HR Magazine.*