More than 1 billion secure Direct messages have now been exchanged.

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Healthcare IT News
CYBERSECURITY
CHECKUP

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Welcome to this edition of Healthcare IT News' Cybersecurity Checkup, where we take a look at the many diverse imperatives of "[securing the healthcare environment](#)," get some encouraging news on secure data exchange from DirectTrust and spotlight a new cybersecurity-focused consultancy just launched by EHNAC.

Send tips, insights, new threat info or general quips to Editor Mike Miliard: [@MikeMiliardHITN](#) or [Mike.Miliard@himssmedia.com](#)

Security is a big job – from access control to earthquakes

Even though we always report on data security at Healthcare IT News, this August we've been taking a closer look at the broader concept of [Securing the Healthcare Environment](#).

That might include [safeguarding patient safety from connected but ever-at-risk medical devices](#), or it might mean [securing the facility itself and protecting the patients inside from the risk of earthquakes](#).

For the month so far, we've been looking at all angles of how providers nationwide are handling these big challenges, including some deep dive case studies on topics such as [credential stuffing and data scraping](#) and identity and access management.

On that latter topic, Healthcare IT News Managing Editor Bill Siwicki shows this week how too many healthcare organizations are managing multiple siloed identities for the same providers and patients, with identity support provided only on an application-by-application basis. As a result, multiple log-ins are often required to get common tasks done – posing obvious security risks.

"In the absence of a comprehensive identity and access management approach, we also see weaker authentication methods in use because it's difficult to integrate state-of-the-art, strong and adaptive authentication methods into each system," said one IAM vendor.

Check back with HITN for the rest of August, as we continue to explore the many challenges of [big-picture healthcare security](#).

How to build a successful, sustainable cybersecurity workforce

Key to meeting those challenges, of course, is an efficient and effective cybersecurity workforce. But building such a team is easier said than done. This month, we reported on a recent whitepaper from the Healthcare and Public Health Sector Coordinating Council, whose Joint Cybersecurity Working Group [offered a guide to developing an effective cyber workforce](#).

In its [report](#), HSCC makes the point that cybersecurity "depends on a knowledgeable workforce of both technical experts who manage enterprise security, and the front-line clinicians whose constant touch of both technology and patients is the last line of defense. Cybersecurity is thus a shared responsibility. It is not just a technical job, but one that reaches across enterprise business and operational roles, and up to the C-Suite."

HSCC identifies what it calls "key rungs of the cyber workforce ladder": hiring students; transitioning IT staff to cybersecurity responsibilities; developing and managing professional development programs for executive-track cybersecurity personnel, and outsourcing critical functions not otherwise resourced within the enterprise.

"Not all organizations have reached a point of maturity for a fully functional and staffed organization," HSCC researchers write. But as is apparent to anyone paying attention, the cybersecurity risks are too great for healthcare organizations not to gain that workforce maturity as quickly as they're able.

Popularity of secure Direct messages continues its upswing

For some good news on the privacy and security front, we turn to DirectTrust, which announced this past week that it has seen "explosive growth" in the number of [simple, secure, email-like Direct exchange transactions](#) over its network so far this year.

During the second quarter of 2019, the nonprofit alliance – which was launched to promote secure, electronic exchanges of protected health information between providers and between providers and patients – tracked nearly 251 million messages sent and received through the DirectTrust network.

That's an increase of nearly 53%, compared with the previous quarter – and nearly 397% over the same period last year, the group says, noting that the cumulative total of Direct exchange transactions since 2014 has surpassed a billion.

Earlier this month, DirectTrust also [announced its development of Trusted Instant Messaging+, or TIM+,](#) an industry-first standard to enable real-time communication of health information, incorporating trust network concepts to ensure secure transmissions between known, trusted entities within and across enterprises.

"We're thrilled with the continued growth of the DirectTrust network – and achieving the landmark milestone of one billion Direct Secure Messages exchanged since inception," said DirectTrust President and CEO Scott Stuewe. "We attribute much of this continued growth to the ease of deployment of Direct Exchange – it's built into EHRs."

EHNAC launches new security consultancy

For those health systems looking for help with risk mitigation, regulatory compliance and general improvement in their cybersecurity posture, a new organization hung out its shingle this past week, as the [Electronic Healthcare Network Accreditation Commission announced a new consulting and advisory arm](#).

EHNAC, a non-profit standards development organization and accrediting body for healthcare groups that exchange electronic health data, seeks to offer guidance for those organizations as they try to navigate regulatory compliance for data security.

It will help with enterprise-wide risk assessments, compliance gaps and third-party assurance requirements among other services, including cybersecurity, HIPAA and HITECH compliance, NIST guidance, standards, and more.

EHNAC's areas of expertise include certification, readiness assessments, HITRUST and SOC audits, and other requirements for privacy and security of health data.

"The increasing number of business, policy drivers and regulatory requirements in our country create pressure for healthcare entities to manage and minimize risk, address compliance requirements and improve health outcomes," Lee Barrett, executive director and CEO of EHNAC, said in a statement. The new consultancy, he said, aim to give healthcare organizations the "critical guidance and support needed to be at their very best and retain their competitive edge."