

HEMIC CONNECTION

Workers' Compensation Resource for Hawai'i Employers / Volume 2 Number 3

The New
HEMIC.COM

The Light at
the End of the
Carpal Tunnel

HIPAA Primer
for Business



Getting Connected

HEMIC.COM

President's Message



Welcome to the 7th edition of HEMIC Connections, dedicated to the new HEMIC web site. We've covered our web site in a past edition of Connections, but felt that our recent overhaul of HEMIC.com was so dramatic that we would lead this issue with our online presence as well.

HEMIC.com was originally built as a resource for you, our members. The redesigned site goes even further to provide you with news and resources that you can use to help make your workplace a safer place and to help reduce insurance fraud.

To that end, we've populated the home page with breaking news and feature articles that will help you understand more about your coverage and the insurance scene in general.

There's a host of new features on the site which are described in this issue. Most exciting is the addition to the website of on-line quotes for new clients. As a mutual company, HEMIC's healthy growth benefits all our members.

In keeping with the theme of the information age, this issue takes a look at the next round of HIPAA electronic privacy regulations that are almost upon us. The new regulations affect virtually every business that keeps or transmits medical information about its employees, including health insurance applications and workers' comp claims.

Finally, we take a look at what some people think of as an affliction of the information age: carpal tunnel syndrome. Is it really caused by too much time at the keyboard?

In all, this issue and our new online presence reinforce our commitment to our insureds, their employees and to the entire business community to make Hawaii's workplaces safer and to lower the cost of workplace injuries in both human and financial terms. Electronically and otherwise, our policy is taking care of Hawaii.

Sincerely,

Robert L. Dove
President and CEO

HEMIC Hawai'i Employers' Mutual Insurance Company, Inc.

BOB DOVE
CEO/President
808 522-5500
bdove@hemic.com

SHAYNE DOBBINS
Director of Information Services
678 585-0449
sdobbins@hemic.com

JOE HEE
Vice President/Finance and Compliance
808 522-5257
jhee@hemic.com

JASON YOSHIMI
Vice President/Accounting & Budget
808 522-5258
jyoshimi@hemic.com

CARLTON CHUN
General Counsel
808 535-5465
cchun@hemic.com

STACY MILLER
Vice President/Claim/Legal Services
808 522-8909
smiller@hemic.com

CONNIE FARIA
Director of Underwriting Services
808 522-5269
cfaria@hemic.com

JOE BENEVIDES
Director of Field Services
808 522-8902
jbenevides@hemic.com

BOB LONG
Director of Network Services
808 522-5857
blong@hemic.com

FAYE BUENO
Director of Administration
808 522-5253
fbueno@hemic.com

HEMIC Connection is published quarterly and is a free service exclusively for policyholders of Hawai'i Employers' Mutual Insurance Company, Inc.

QUESTIONS & COMMENTS

Are there questions and ideas you'd like to share? Please write us at HEMIC Connection P.O. Box 3376, Honolulu, Hawai'i 96801 or email us at info@hemic.com.

The New HEMIC.com

It seems like only yesterday that HEMIC published its first website. At that time, the full potential of the web had yet to be shown, and our web presence was little more than an online brochure describing HEMIC's services.

A lot has changed since then. The web has become the premier tool for finding information and getting business done. In our industry, the web has allowed clients and agents to access accounts at will and to report fraud online.

As we developed the new site, we wanted to put the power of the web into the hands of our insureds, to offer them new ways of getting support and information, and to help them fight fraud and promote safety in the workplace.

The new HEMIC site is a rich interactive tool that will be useful to our insureds and their agents, as well as to the entire business

community. The homepage is a hub for information about workers' comp insurance, from timely news to the schedule of safety seminars on Kauai. When our members know about these issues, the costs of insuring workers' comp decrease, as does the number of injuries in the workplace.

For agents and members, there are hot keys to take them directly to their secure areas. The function of these areas remains fundamentally the same as the old site.

The new site has a great new look and simple, direct navigation to help you get what you need as quickly as possible. For members interested in a particular subject, there's a powerful search engine that will comb the

archives for articles on, say, preventing employee fraud, or avoiding back injuries. And there's an interactive menu of all the safety videos in our library, making it easier than ever to order a video on the topic of your choice.

We hope you'll make the new website your primary resource for finding out how to best protect your company and your employees.



What you'll find at HEMIC.com

- New interface to make it easier than ever to find the services or information you need
- Redesigned home page to bring you timely topics on the workers' comp insurance scene, as well as articles on fraud prevention and safety in the workplace
- Powerful search engine that enables you to look for articles or news on any given topic.
- Interactive menu of HEMIC's safety videos that enables members to browse our extensive library of titles and to order videos online.
- Online fraud reporting
- Online quotes for new clients
- Agent locator for all islands
- Searchable schedule for HEMIC Safety seminars on each Island
- Archive of past newsletters in PDF format



The New Privacy Regs: A HIPAA Primer

Internet privacy issues drove the government to act. Now it's our turn.

The technological innovations of the last few years have increased the speed and efficiency of business immeasurably. But the benefits of electronic information age have not come without a cost. Because information is so easily and rapidly transmitted via the web and email, there have been grave concerns about the erosion of privacy.

In particular, the new technologies have raised scores of questions about the rights of patients whose medical records are stored, transmitted or shared electronically. When can a patient's records be shared with other health care providers or insurers? What right does a patient have to restrict the availability of his or her records? What responsibility do health care industry organizations have to keep patients' information secure?

In response to these and other questions, the federal government enacted legislation in 1996 aimed at minimizing the opportunity for abuse of patients' medical information. The Health Insurance Portability & Accountability Act of 1996, known by the acronym HIPAA, was the result. The goal was to improve efficiency in healthcare delivery by standardizing electronic data interchange, and protect the confidentiality and security of health data by setting and enforcing standards.

The effect has been felt in every sector of the health care industry as it has brought about sweeping changes in most healthcare transaction and administrative information systems. Literally all healthcare organizations have been affected, including health care providers, health plans, employers, public health authorities, insurers, clearinghouses, billing agencies, information systems vendors, service organizations, and universities.

As a provider of workers' compensation insurance, HEMIC is clearly impacted by the new regulations. Our management and staff have looked at every aspect of the way we handle claims to assure that we effectively deal with all compliance issues.

What HIPAA Does

HIPAA calls for the standardization of electronic patient health, administrative and financial data; the implementation of unique health identifiers for individuals, employers, health plans and health care providers; and security standards protecting the confidentiality and integrity of "individually identifiable health information," past, present or future.

The new HIPAA regulations reflect five basic principles:

1. **Consumer Control:** The regulation provides consumers with critical new rights to control the release of their medical information
2. **Boundaries:** With few exceptions, an individual's health care information

Electronic privacy for medical records is not only a good idea — it's now the Law.

- should be used for health purposes only, including treatment and payment.
- 3. **Accountability:** Under HIPAA, for the first time, there are specific federal penalties if a patient's right to privacy is violated.
- 4. **Public Responsibility:** Privacy protection must be balanced with the responsibility to protect public health, conduct medical research, improve the quality of care, and fight health care fraud and abuse.
- 5. **Security:** Organizations that are entrusted with health information are responsible to protect against deliberate or inadvertent misuse or disclosure.

As with any legislation of such sweeping scope and effect, a number of years have passed as specifics of the rules and regulations have been ironed out. The compliance date for the Transactions Rule was October 16, 2002. The Privacy Rule, which became effective April 14, 2001, will require mandatory compliance by April 14, 2003. Other parts of the Act are still being worked out. HIPAA calls for severe civil and criminal penalties for noncompliance, so organizations keep a watchful eye on these deadlines.

Doing Our Part

For many organizations that handle medical data, a number of steps have been taken to assure compliance with the rules. These include:

- Building organizational awareness of HIPAA
- Assessing the organization's information security systems, policies and procedures

- Developing action plans with deadlines and timetables and the infrastructure to implement the plan
- Implementing the action plan, including new policies, procedures and technologies.
- On-going training and enforcement

We at HEMIC applaud the intention of the new regulation. We hope compliance requirements will be further streamlined to avoid onerous costs and workloads related to compliance. We encourage our members to find out all they can to insure that they are ready for the next compliance deadline

For more information about HIPAA, see these web sites:

The U.S. Health and Human Services' Office for Civil Rights
www.hhs.gov/ocr/hipaa/

The U.S. HHS' Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation
aspe.hhs.gov/admsimp

The HIPAA Advisory Organization
www.hipaadvisory.com/

Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services
www.cms.gov/hipaa

HIPAA.ORG www.hipaa.org

The Light at the End of the Carpal Tunnel

Spending too much time at the computer? Your eyes may be burning, but it may not be the cause of the numbness in your hands.



It's a common myth that carpal tunnel syndrome is a disease of our digital society, caused by long hours at the computer keyboard. But carpal tunnel syndrome dates back long before Dell, Gates and even Eniac. Evidence of this nerve disorder of the wrist and hand can be found in medical records at the beginning of the 20th century. Blame it on the repetitive tasks required by the industrial age, not the information age.

As working tasks have become even more repetitive in the last couple of decades, there has been an increase in cases of carpal tunnel syndrome. And, yes, typing at the keyboard may be one of those tasks. (Though a 2001 study in the journal *Neurology* found that computer users experienced the condition at frequencies comparable to the general public.) Carpal Tunnel Syndrome is now the most common nerve problem affecting peoples' hands.

It can affect almost anyone, but the majority of sufferers are women between 40 and 55. Women are 3 times more likely to

develop carpal tunnel syndrome than are men. The risk of carpal tunnel syndrome increases with age, with the highest risk for those between 40 and 60 years of age. Certain conditions such as obesity, diabetes, thyroid problems and rheumatoid arthritis have been associated with an increased risk of carpal tunnel syndrome. Injuries such as a broken wrist or dislocated hand bones can also lead to the condition later in life.

The carpal tunnel in question is a narrow passageway—about as big around as your thumb—on the palm side of your wrist. This tunnel protects a main nerve to your hand and nine tendons that bend your fingers. When pressure is put on the median nerve it produces the numbness and pain associated with the condition.

The earliest symptoms may be intermittent numbness in the hand while writing, driving, holding a book or when typing. You may wake up with your hands feeling numb or painful or start to drop small objects from your hand. Sometimes the sufferer feels

“shocks” that emanate from the center of the wrist into the hand.

If you suspect you have carpal tunnel syndrome, you should be examined for the condition right away. It can get worse and, left untreated, can result in weakness of the small muscles in the hand or nerve damage. After a while, carpal tunnel can result in a “blind” hand, in which you lose the feeling in the thumb, index and middle fingers. Pay close attention to where the tingling is located to help your doctor determine what nerve is causing the problem.

It's a good idea to see a specialist who understands the details of nerve and muscle problems such as an orthopedic surgeon or physical therapist who specializes in hand and nerve problems. Electromyography and nerve conduction studies may help to locate the problem and determine its severity. Fortunately, for most people who develop carpal tunnel syndrome, proper treatment usually can relieve the pain and numbness and restore normal use of the wrists and hands.

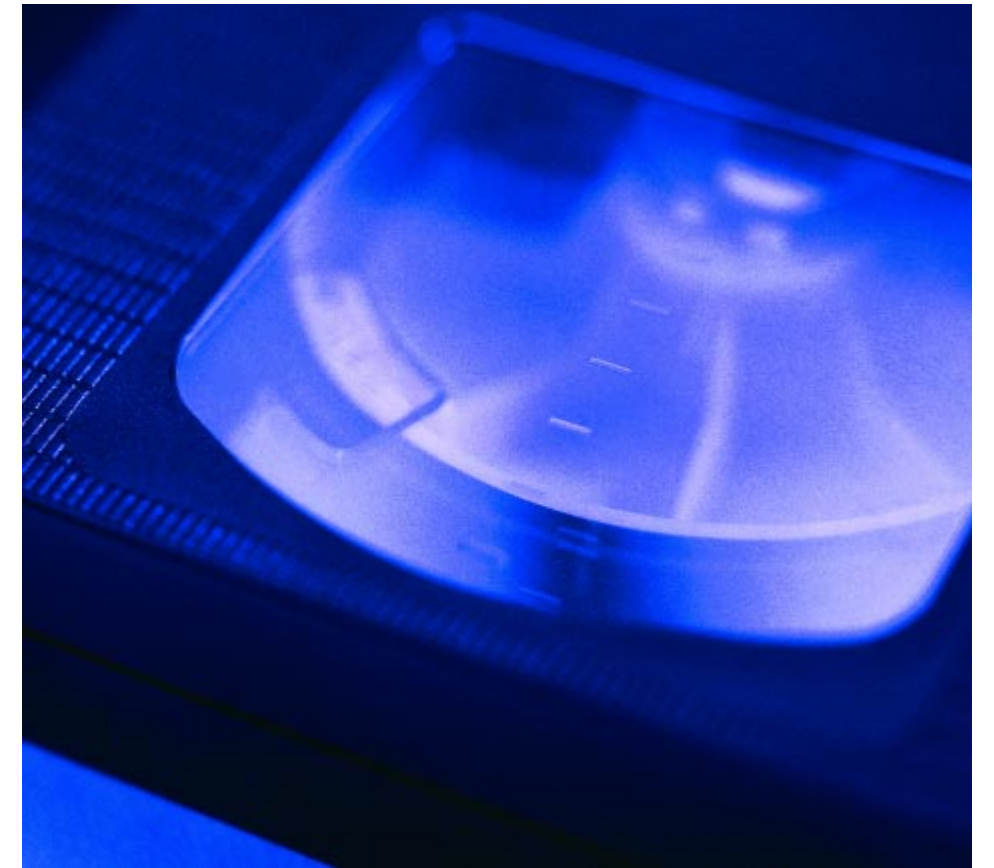
There are no proven strategies to prevent carpal tunnel syndrome, but to protect your hands from a variety of ailments, take the following precautions:

Reduce your force and relax your grip. Studies show that most people use four to five times more force than they need to perform most tasks involving the hands. If your work involves a cash register, for instance, hit the keys softly. If you frequently write by hand, use a big pen with an oversized, soft grip and free-flowing ink.

Take frequent breaks. Every 15 to 20 minutes give your hands and wrists a break by gently stretching and bending them. Alternate tasks when possible. Type for 15 minutes then do some phone work for 5 minutes. If you use equipment that vibrates or on which you exert a great amount of force, taking breaks is even more important.

Watch your form. Avoid bending your wrist all the way up or down. A relaxed middle position is best. If you use a keyboard, keep it at elbow height or slightly lower.

Improve your posture. The tendency to roll the shoulders forward shortens the neck and shoulders muscles, compressing nerves in the neck. This, in turn, can affect the wrist, fingers and hand.



Safety Online

When our members provide a safer workplace, everyone wins: employees suffer fewer injuries, HEMIC pays fewer claims, and the cost of insurance decreases. That's why HEMIC has made a commitment to providing resources that help our members learn about safety and health issues. Our ongoing series of safety seminars and our library of safety videos and CD's are two ways we do that.

The new HEMIC.com website brings our extensive library catalogue of safety and health videos to the Internet. From the HEMIC.com homepage, navigate to Safety/Videos to see a list of available titles and their lengths. Our library has been recently updated and includes over 140 videos that range from 5 to 20 minutes in length. We encourage members to borrow the videos and organize viewings for man-

agers and employees. Up to four titles at a time can be ordered online and delivered to your workplace.

For an excellent training series on ergonomics in the workplace, we encourage members to borrow our new set of Ergonomics CD-ROM's. They provide an excellent overview of ergonomic issues and suggestions of what you can do to promote a healthier workplace. For information about the Ergonomic CD series, contact Tracie Shimatsu at tshimatsu@hemic.com.

To find out about our safety seminars, navigate to Safety/Seminars from the homepage. There you'll get a complete description of each of our 11 Loss Prevention Seminar modules. Then you can click on your Island to find out when the module is scheduled for your area.




HEMIC FRAUD HOTLINE

If you suspect an employee or co-worker is receiving workers' compensation benefits due to a fraudulent claim, call the hotline today. All calls are strictly confidential.

On Oahu Call
522-5279

Neighbor Islands Toll Free
1-888-522-5295



Protect your business and your employees.
Report all injuries within 24-hours.



*Hawaii Employers' Mutual
Insurance Company, Inc.*

1001 Bishop Street,
Pauhai Tower, Suite 1000
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Mailing Address:


HEMIC
P.O. Box 3376
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96801

Island of O'ahu:

Tel: (808) 524-3642
Fax: (808) 522-5855

Neighbor Islands:

Toll Free: 888 292-3642
Toll Free Fax: 888 686-5510



PRESORTED
STANDARD
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
HONOLULU, HI
PERMIT NO. 564