

Muskegon Chronicle

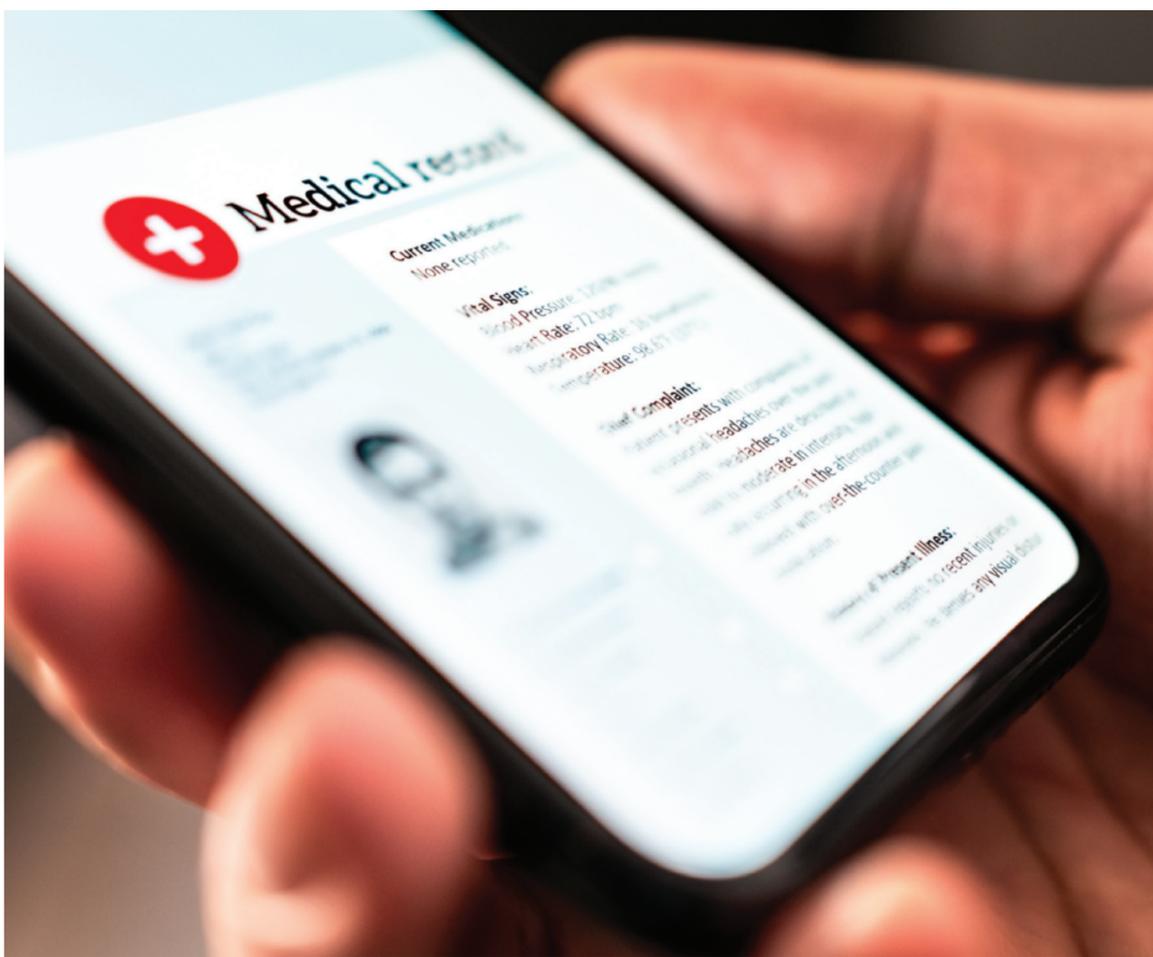


MOTOWN MAGIC

THE DETROIT RED WINGS AND DETROIT PISTONS ARE ATOP THE CONFERENCE STANDINGS, FOLLOWING WINS WEDNESDAY NIGHT. THE RED WINGS OUTLASTED TORONTO IN OVERTIME. **B1**

HEALTH CARE

Can your health records be sold for profit?



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In a lawsuit, Epic Systems claims 300,000 people's digital health information records were accessed.

Daniel Gilbert *Washington Post*

On the digital superhighway that allows sensitive patient health records to be shared by hospitals and doctors, something seemed off to engineers at Epic Systems: Among the providers with access to the network were names that sounded like law firms.

That observation in 2022 led to an investigation into what Epic, the nation's largest vendor of electronic health record software, alleges are "organized syndicates" that fraudulently obtained access to nearly 300,000 patient records without their consent, in many cases marketing them to lawyers to allegedly mine for prospective clients.

Epic's disclosures offer a rare glimpse into the unseen workings of how your personal medical records move from one network to another, who has access to them, and where there may be gaps that allow medical privacy to be breached and sensitive information exploited for commercial gain.

If bad actors' access isn't curtailed, Epic

Health Gorilla broadly denied the allegations, calling them "yet another example of Epic's exclusionary actions that limit competition and restrict access to health care data."

argues in a lawsuit it filed last week, the viability of the U.S. system for sharing health records is threatened. Some of the firms targeted by Epic contend they were performing legitimate services for patients that complied with federal privacy requirements, and they accuse Epic of acting in bad faith.

The networks for sharing identifiable patient records operate similarly to those for cellphones. Just as someone with an AT&T plan can call a friend on a Verizon plan, one medical practice can send medical records electronically to another that uses different software on an "interoperability frame-

work." That makes it possible for physicians in an emergency room to pull up the medical history of a patient they've never seen before.

Epic says bad actors disguise themselves as health care providers to access patient records, when they really are catering to law firms seeking people with particular diagnoses or health conditions to join class actions. A firm called Integritort was added to a network as offering treatment, though as Epic and its co-plaintiffs point out, the "tort" in its name suggests a legal rather than health care purpose.

The lawsuit cites a video of an Integritort sales pitch to a business generating leads for law firms, in which the company obtained "in real time, an audience member's sensitive health information by falsely claiming" it offered treatment to gain access to a network of medical records.

Daniel Baker, who was Integritort's CEO, said in an interview that he doubted that happened. Integritort shut down in 2024 after it lost access to a network of medical records, he said.

"Do you think we were trying to hide something with the name Integritort?" Baker said. The business model, he said, was about facilitating access to records that can be hard for patients to get on their own. Law firms referred their clients to Integritort, which connected them with physicians, Baker said.

SEE HEALTH CARE, A3

MICHIGAN HEALTH

Planned Parenthood adds vasectomies to its services

The clinics had stopped offering the surgery several years ago.

Eli Newman *Bridge Michigan*

GRAND RAPIDS — Citing an increased demand for "permanent birth control" since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned abortion access across the country, Planned Parenthood of Michigan will now offer vasectomy services to its patients.

The minor surgery is being offered at Planned Parenthood of Michigan's Irwin/Martin Health Center in Grand Rapids, with more locations expected to add the procedure throughout the year. Planned Parenthood maintains 10 clinic buildings in Michigan and a statewide telehealth program.

The Michigan chapter ceased its vasectomy operations about a decade ago, officials said, but a newfound need has pushed the organization to resume its efforts.

"The demand is real and present," said Dr. Kate Starr, chief medical officer at Planned Parenthood of Michigan. "Patients and their partners are looking for ways to control their lives and their families, and vasectomy is one of the ways in which they can do that."

The surgery will be available to adults 21 and older and costs \$800 without insurance coverage, including a \$100 consultation fee. Planned Parenthood of Michigan is in-network for many health plans.

"There are patients in the state of Michigan whose only option has been being on a long wait list for a hospital-based procedure six to eight months from now," Starr said. "We are offering access to folks who want vasectomy and also likely need reasonably priced care."

Planned Parenthood of Michigan, which serves about 50,000 patients each year, and its national counterpart are facing funding cuts from the Trump administration. Millions of dollars tied to Title X family planning were restored in December after being withheld for months.

SEE MICHIGAN HEALTH, A3



Anti-abortion protesters demonstrate outside the Planned Parenthood clinic in Grand Rapids in this photo from April. The Grand Rapids location now is offering vasectomy services.

MLive.com files

Ferris State grad gets call from NFL to referee first Super Bowl

He has been officiating football games since junior high.

Ryan Boldrey *rboldrey@mlive.com*

BIG RAPIDS — Shawn Smith said he was "humbled" to receive the call after being selected as the lead on-field official for Super Bowl LX.

The Detroit-area native and 1994 Ferris State graduate will be making his first appearance in the big game when he dons the white hat on Feb. 8 at Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara, California.

Smith is in his 11th year as an NFL official and eighth as referee.

As referee, he manages the entire officiating crew on game day, announces the penalties and is the final authority on rulings.

"I'm humbled, but very excited by this opportunity," he said. "So many people built the foundation for this to happen. A lot of folks created opportunities for me."

"I'm excited for the people at Ferris State, and the high school folks, and all the people who helped me along the way."

Smith has officiated in 11 playoff games in his career, including this past weekend's New England-Houston AFC contest, according to NFL.com. He was the alternate referee for Super Bowls LV and LVIII, but the 2026 game will be his first on-field appearance at the big game.

Long before he officiated his first NFL game, Smith was blowing the whistle at Pop

Warner games, while in junior high, according to an announcement from Ferris State.

He would later go on to officiate flag football while attending Eastern Michigan University, where he was recruited to run track and play football.

After transferring to Ferris State, he began to officiate high school football and skipped over Division III college football straight to Division II.

Smith, who graduated from Ferris in 1994 with a degree in accounting, would eventually be hired by the NFL in 2015.

He learned Tuesday that he would be calling this year's biggest game.

SEE BIG GAME, A3

