Researchers entrusted with personal health information have always had a duty to protect that information – indeed, the Hippocratic tradition has for millennia made clear that such information is special, even sacred. But Hippocrates did not contemplate outcomes research, data mining or digitized genetic data. Moreover, with a new federal privacy protection law about to take effect, investigators must hew for the first time to a nationwide standard. Aspects of the new law are being intensely debated.

Prof. Cava, in UM’s Department of Business Law, is co-director of the university’s Ethics Programs; Dr. Cushman works with the Ethics Programs’ new Privacy and Data Protection Team; and Mr. Novo is Assistant General Counsel based at the School of Medicine.

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