



An Implantable ID



By George Meyer, MD

ON OCTOBER 13, 2004, the Food and Drug Administration approved the VeriChip™ for medical uses in humans in the United States. This chip uses radio frequency identification (RFID) technology in a small glass-covered microchip that is inserted under the skin.

Each chip has a unique 16-digit verification number that allows access over the internet to whatever data is stored for that individual. A scanner run over the insertion site reads the number. The scanner sends a low frequency signal to "awaken" the chip and give it the power necessary to send its numeric code back to the scanner.

This technology is not new. The prototype was invented in 1979 in California by Mike Beigel, an MIT graduate. He is President and Project Director of Beigel Technology Corporation (BTC), in Encinitas, California, an R&D and consulting organization specializing in such fields as RFID, computers, and technology development and applications.

The technology was first applied in animals. In the early 1990's, zoos around the world began inserting microchips in their animals. Many endangered species worldwide, such as grizzly bears, black-footed ferrets and giant land tortoises, received similar chips. Many U.S. and foreign cities required such chips as part of the licensing process for pets by the year 2000. This procedure allowed easier identification of lost pets and also allowed SPCAs to find owners of abandoned animals. Microchip identification systems are available to such groups as breeders and trainers, horse associations, and pet stores.

The VeriChip, produced by the VeriChip Corporation, a subsidiary of Applied Digital Solutions, is a 12 mm by 2.1 mm device, which is about the size of a ballpoint pen point or a piece of rice. It is implanted through a sterile syringe into the subcutaneous tissue. The company touts it for many nonmedical uses, such as security identification (e.g., control authorized access to certain locations) and financial identification (e.g., prevent fraudulent use of ATMs and credit card accounts). It has been marketed in Europe and Mexico for its security and identification applications. It was recently announced that the Attorney General of Mexico and some of his staff have been "chipped."

Ideally, personal medical data could be maintained at a secure internet location and the digital code would allow access to it. This could help the care of unconscious patients or help identify lost demented patients.

The chips will cost about \$200 and the scanners about \$650 The company plans to donate 200 scanners to trauma centers.

The Sacramento Bee on October 16, 2004, wrote an editorial in support of this system for the acquisition of medical data. However, there are many objections to the use of these chips, some of them ethical and some based on invasion of privacy.

If individuals get unauthorized access to a scanner, or can make one on their own, they may then access such security information or medical data.

Could insertion of a chip be made a requirement for all welfare enrollees or parolees?

Information about the chip or the company can be obtained at www.4verichip.com or 800-970-chip.

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