

ISLAND SECURITY POLICY INSTITUTE

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POLICY BRIEF

Insider Threat in Island Healthcare Systems

Patient Safety, Data Security, and Workforce Integrity in Geographically Isolated Medical Environments

Research Pillar: Insider Threat & Workplace Security Policy

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **Island healthcare organizations are the sole medical resource for geographically isolated populations — creating workforce dependency that makes standard personnel responses to concerning behavior operationally catastrophic.**
- **Community social density in island healthcare creates HIPAA compliance and patient safety risks that continental healthcare security frameworks do not address.**
- **Drug diversion, patient data access, and supply chain fraud present differently in island healthcare contexts where community relationships overlay every professional interaction.**

A Hawaii community hospital discovered in 2022 that a clinical staff member had been accessing patient records of individuals known to them in the community for a period exceeding eighteen months. The hospital's access audit system had flagged the pattern multiple times. The flags had gone unreviewed because the IT security staff responsible for reviewing them was the same staff responsible for running clinical systems — and clinical system uptime consistently took priority.¹

The Sole Provider Constraint

Continental healthcare systems can respond to concerning employee behavior in the knowledge that replacement staff can be sourced within a manageable timeframe. Island healthcare organizations face a fundamentally different constraint: the nurse whose behavior is concerning may be one of three nurses qualified to manage the ICU. The physician whose access pattern is anomalous may be the only surgeon within a hundred miles. This sole provider constraint requires a graduated response framework that can manage risk while preserving operational capacity that the community cannot afford to lose.

Policy Recommendations

1. Develop island healthcare-specific insider threat assessment and response frameworks with graduated response protocols that manage insider risk without creating clinical capacity crises.
2. Establish shared health IT security audit services for small island hospitals providing professional access pattern review without requiring individual hospitals to maintain dedicated security monitoring staff.
3. Commission research on community relationship-based patient record access in island healthcare environments to develop targeted detection and prevention protocols.[FN]

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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The Island Security Policy Institute (ISPI) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization based in Honolulu, Hawaii. ISPI produces practitioner-led research, policy analysis, training programs, and commissioned research on public safety, emergency preparedness, insider threat, and security policy for island and coastal communities worldwide. ISPI is registered as a federal contractor on SAM.gov under NAICS 541720. Warren Pulley, Founder & Executive Director.

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