

THE BOSTON GLOBE TUESDAY, MAY 20, 2003

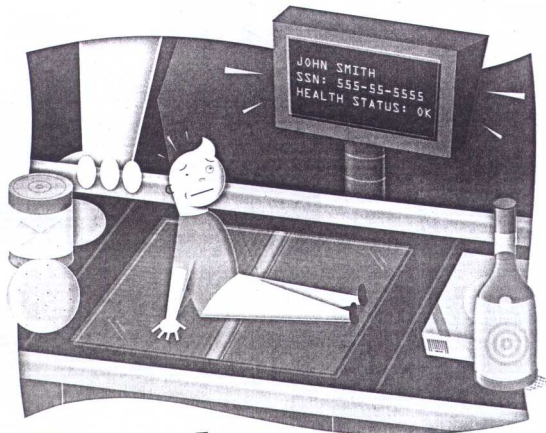


ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN UELAND

Barcoding humans

The era of implanting people with identity chips is upon us. Should we worry?

By Angela Swafford
ALSO BY CORRESPONDENT

The painless procedure barely lasted 15 minutes. In his South Florida office, Dr. Harvey Kleinert applied a local anesthetic above the crease of my right arm, then he inserted a thick needle deep under the skin.

"First we locate a prime spot," he said. "The next thing is to release the button that triggers the injection mechanism, and that's it, the cargo's been delivered."

The "cargo" was a half-inch-long microchip inside a glass and silicone cylinder that carries my permanent identification number. For an instant, I remembered the famous scene in the

movie "Fantastic Voyage" in which a miniaturized Ragsdale Welch and her companions are inserted, submarine and all, into the vein of a patient. In my case, the tiny chip inside me can transmit personal information to anyone with a special handheld scanner.

Theoretically, this VeriChip will allow doctors to call up my medical records even if I'm too badly hurt to answer questions. It is also supposed

to allow me to get money from an automatic teller machine by flashing my arm instead of punching in my PIN number. Or reassure airport security that I am a journalist, not a terrorist. And, though the VeriChip strikes critics as Orwellian, its makers think the surgically implanted IDs could be the Social Security numbers of the future in a nervous world.

"I believe the day will come when most of us will have something similar to the VeriChip under our skin," said Scott Silverman, president of Florida-based Applied Digital Solutions. "People will regard that its benefits — in terms of financial, security, and health care — far outweigh the possibility of loss of privacy."

Right now, I am part of a very small club, the 18th person in the world — and the first journalist — to get "chipped." Most of the others are AD&S employees along with one Florida family who have been jokingly dubbed "the Chipsons" in a play on the old *Jaws* cartoon.

The idea of a system that gives emergency workers and others immediate access to potentially lifesaving information is exactly what drew the Jacobs family of Boca Raton to the VeriChip. At the request of their 14-year-old son, Derek,

CHIP, Page C12