Letters to the Editor

Doctors' response to computer virus

Sir,

With the availability of computers and the Internet taking firm roots in day-to-day life, there are many problems associated with it. Physician use computers for many general purposes like the common masses and they also down load medical information from the Internet and relevant medical websites as well as preserve their own scientific work.[1] However in case of any unfortunate event of virus infecting the system, the experience can be traumatic. We interviewed 10 doctors working in Najran on their response to the effect of virus, which had damaged their data. A questionnaire was given to all that was as follows: 1. How many times your data was damaged due to virus? 1, 2, 3, more (tick relevant). 2. Were you specifically targeted or you were a part of general target? 3. What were your immediate feelings? Anger, depression, helplessness, sense of deceit, sense of being unsafe, regret, sense of revenge, happy. (tick all relevant) 4. What type of data was damaged? Scientific data, account details, photographs, letters and email, others (tick all relevant). 5. How much data was lost? Complete, or partial loss? 6. What precautionary measures you have taken? Change of password, change of e-mail identity, change of server, may not allow free distribution of e-mail address, may not give e-mail address to advertising agencies. (tick all relevant). Results were analyzed which revealed that 9 out of 10 had the first experience with virus and one for the 2nd time. Two of the doctors were being specifically targeted whereas 8 were a part of general targets. Ninety percent of the subjects had a feeling of depression, feeling of helplessness and regrets, 80% had a feeling of insecurity and 60% had a feeling of being deceived, one of the subjects was just happy and was trying to know how it all works. In 20% hard scientific data including personal research data was lost, 20% suffered loss of money accounts, 60% were worried regarding loss of precious photographs, 50% had loss of important e-mails and e-mail addresses and 90% had lost other types of data, 20% had suffered a total loss of data and 80% had a partial loss of data. These subjects took the following precautionary measures. Change of password 10%, change of e-mail identity 20%, change of server none, 40% did not allow a free distribution of their e-mail address, and 80% did not provide their e-mail address to advertising agencies. We concluded that physicians in Najran are still new at using computers. Ninety percent of our subjects were facing the problem for the first time and the response to loss of data was also very strong. The majority showed signs of depression and helplessness and possibly a response, similar to any loss in life such as a failure or loss of some important belonging. Eighty percent of the subjects had a sense of insecurity with the Internet and would be very cautious in future, and would take any and all relevant precautionary measures. More than half the subjects had a sense of being deceived by electronic mail and therefore were losing trust in electronic mail. Two of our subjects were specifically targeted for unknown reasons and were getting repeated e-mails containing virus after recovering from the loss of data; this forced them to change the e-mail address completely. In one case, e-mail password was hacked and thousands of e-mails were sent from that address which contained deadly virus. This subject used a change of password. None of the subject were in favor of change of server. However the majority believed that sending your e-mail address to advertising agencies for free newsletter or reminders was the main reason for widespread dissemination of your identity which increased your chances of getting the virus. We believe that besides all the precautionary measures, which our subjects had taken, all-important data should be stored separately on a floppy disk or other computer so that in case of any eventuality, it can be recovered. Further passwords for all e-mails identities should be ideally a combination of letters and numbers which are difficult to guess. E-mails, which are from unidentified senders, should not be opened unless the identity of sender is confirmed. Most of the viruses come in the form of attachments which if downloaded are installed on the computer. Important data should be segregated and kept in a non-default drive of the computer. Biological metaphors offer insight into many aspects of computer viruses and can inspire defenses against them. One of the many anti-viral programs available in the market should be installed. We believe that other people elsewhere are also suffering like this, and we hope that our readers will benefit from the experiences of our colleagues and will remain cautious!

References

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