

Health Providers' Privacy Obligations for Patient Records

Handle with Care: Patient Records

The old saying that there is no such thing as bad publicity has a nice ring to it, but health professionals know better. No one wants to hear their name mentioned on a news report about privacy violations of patient information. Or worse, on a court summons.

In addition to the threat of fines of up to \$500,000 and possible jail time, privacy violations can damage the reputation of an individual and their profession for years to come.

A recent case of thousands of medical files discovered in a Regina recycling bin received significant negative media attention.

This incident brings home the importance of trustee responsibility for health information.

The *Health Information Protection Act* (HIPA) and its regulations describe the responsibilities of people who are “trustees” of personal health information.

Under HIPA, trustees have a duty to:

- Ensure records are stored safely and securely;
- Prevent unauthorized access to the information;
- Ensure patients have access; and
- During disposal, protect patient privacy until records are fully destroyed.

Protect yourself and those you work with by making sure you have clear procedures in place for handling and protecting the personal health information of your clients.

The Ministry of Health advises that all trustees and their office managers should review their compliance with information protection laws and regulations, and make adjustments to processes and security measures where necessary.

For more information

Contact your professional regulatory body.

Visit the Saskatchewan Health website:

www.health.gov.sk.ca/health-information-protection-act

Read the Saskatchewan Information and Privacy Commissioner's Advisory for Saskatchewan Health Trustees for Record Disposition, under the What's New tab on the Commissioner's website:

www.oipc.sk.ca/whats_new.htm