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GP clinics urged to review privacy policies

Tessa Hoffman | 5 May, 2016 | 1 comments Read Later

GP clinics are being urged to review privacy policies after an investigation suggests many may be in breach of privacy law.

Last year, the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC) audited the privacy policies of 40 clinics against national privacy law requirements.

It found that many fell short across many areas, exposing clinics to the risk of prosecution.

One common fault was the absence of any statement telling patients how and why their information was being collected and protected.

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Another issue was the relatively high reading age patients needed in order to understand the policies.

The OAIC said nearly 80% of the policies required an education of above Grade 12 so that they could be "easily read".

According to the commissioner, four practices that took part in the audit did not have a privacy policy that could be assessed.

Of the remaining 36 clinics, only two explained how patients could make a privacy complaint and only two told patients how to request personal information.

Many clinics failed to meet the legal requirement to explain in their policies how and why patients' information was collected and stored.

"GP clinics appeared to find this the most difficult requirement to address and were not fully complying with their obligations for a variety of reasons," the report stated.

Only one policy referred to how personal information was collected, used or disclosed within the MyHealth Record system.

And no policy mentioned how personal information was used in the electronic transfer of prescription service.

"Generally, clinics did reasonably well on security issues, with 25 or 36 privacy policies describing the reasonable steps the practice took to protect patients' personal information," the report said.

"However, several privacy policies provided only a general statement, such as 'information is held

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securely', which assessors considered insufficient.

"In these cases, a recommendation was made that the policy provide high-level information on the most relevant security measures the clinic had, such as the use of passwords to protect electronic information and keeping paper files in secure cabinets."

The OAIC audit did not assess how did not consider how the information handling procedures set out in the privacy policy were implemented in practice

But since carrying out the review, the privacy commissioner has been working with the AMA, RACGP, ACRRM and the Australian Association of Practice Management to provide practical support to practices.

Dr Brian Morton, chair of the AMA council of general practice, said the commissioner had sent "a clear signal that [practices] can do better, including with getting all the paperwork right".

In response to the findings, the AMA has updated its privacy-policy template in its *Privacy and Health Record Resource Handbook*, Dr Morton said.

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Subtractor · 2 days ago
For Pete's sake... what are they trying to do..? Here they are castigating us for not having some printed sign somewhere outlining how their private information is secure and why, while at the same time admitting many patients won't be able to read it, (somehow that's our problem as well), and at the same time, we Drs are coming under extreme pressure - blackmail actually - because of their threat of our therefore losing out on IT PIP if we don't, to upload this very same private medical history to MyHealth. This, when the reason we are fighting this upload to the cloud is precisely because we don't trust it will be secure enough, or complete enough to be safe, and will also be a ready target for every insurance co and legal eagle wanting access to a patient's history to exert pressure on the patients to gain access to it. You think that won't happen..? In your dreams, bureaucrats...it will. And that's before the expert hackers get going...

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