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Covenant Health apologizes to patients and takes action after patient images go missing

Toll free number set up to respond to patient concerns

Edmonton, Canada

Covenant Health has taken steps to change how it handles patient images after an unencrypted back-up hard drive containing digital images went missing.

“We apologize for the emotional distress the loss of this hard drive may cause our patients,” says Patrick Dumelie, Covenant Health President and CEO. “I also want to reassure anyone who comes to our facilities for care; changes have been made and we are working with staff and the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner to prevent this from happening again.”

The images were not stored according to Covenant Health’s policies on the protection of information. All the originals of the missing images are now uploaded to a secure server meeting privacy and information technology standards and Covenant Health is reviewing its practices and providing staff education and training around secure image storage.

This weekend a team of highly trained staff was contacting the 233 impacted patients. The missing photos and two videos are back-ups of images taken at the Misericordia from 2002 to 2010.

“We are doing all we can to ensure our patients are informed appropriately and in a respectful manner,” says Dumelie. “We recognize when patients enter our facilities, they are in vulnerable situations that require great care and compassion.”

147 of the 233 patients impacted have been contacted by Covenant Health. If people had an image taken or suffered a late term pregnancy loss while they were a patient at the Misericordia Community Hospital between 2002 and 2010 and have concerns, they are asked to call **1.855. 735. 9900**. The line will be staffed from 3:00 p.m. until 8:00 p.m. Monday to Friday until March 25, 2011.

Background

- There are 233 patient folders containing approximately 3,600 photos and two videos on the missing unencrypted hard drive
- The missing images are back-ups of images taken at the Misericordia Community Hospital between 2002 and 2010
- The missing hard drive did not contain any original images – all original images are secure
- The folders and file names included the patient’s name and hospital number. They did not contain the Alberta Health Care number or any other personal identification, with the exception of four files. There was no financial information in any of the files



The folders containing patient images were from the following areas:

- Hyperbaric Oxygen Chamber
- Infant bereavement
- Laboratory specimen
- Clinical and wound documentation
- Surgery
- Reconstructive surgery (two videos)

Timeline

- Unencrypted hard drive was last seen January 17, 2011 – it was placed under a desk while other equipment in the office was being moved to a new location
- Noticed missing January 28, 2011
- Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner Informed February 3, 2011 – report was filed and work with OIPC is ongoing
- Incident investigated by Covenant Health Protective Services – concluded no sign of break-in or indication of a theft
- Thorough search of the hospital conducted – no sign of misplaced hard drive
- Phoning blitz March 11, 12 and 13, 2011 - done during the weekend in an effort to contact the maximum number of patients at home.

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Covenant Health is Canada's largest Catholic health care organization with over 14,000 physicians, employees and volunteers serving in 11 communities across Alberta. A major provider in Alberta's integrated health system, Covenant Health works with Alberta Health Services and community partners to positively influence the health of Albertans through a broad range of programs and services.

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