

Wednesday May 27, 2020

Protecting personal information is one of our most important responsibilities at Houston Methodist. We take our patients' right to privacy very seriously. On April 15, 2020, Houston Methodist notified patients of an incident which resulted in the disclosure of full name, gender, date of birth, procedure date and time, procedural image (which is only viewable using the proprietary medical device), medical record number, procedure reference code and the physician's name. We sincerely apologize for this incident. Please be assured that only the above information was disclosed — no financial information was involved. Because the notice did not reach a handful of individuals who were impacted, Houston Methodist is providing this substitute notice.

With today's advanced medical technology, it is not uncommon for hospitals and providers to rely on the expert skills of medical device manufacturers to operate some of the highly specialized equipment. The representatives are trained professionals and are required to follow our established policies, training, and contractual obligations. On February 19, 2020, we learned that our vendor who operates a device in our Cardiac Catheterization Lab, did not follow established controls which resulted in a breach of information on February 18, 2020. Specifically, the representative removed external hard drives from our premises when he believed the designated storage room was locked due to the late hour of the day. Subsequently, he left the drives in his vehicle for a brief time during which his vehicle was broken into and the drives were stolen. The local police were notified but were unable to recover the drives. Additionally, a private investigator was unable to secure any video footage from area businesses.

Our internal investigation determined we had appropriate policies, training, technical safeguards, and contractual obligations in place, but the representative failed to follow those established controls, as well as the controls of the medical device manufacturer with which he was employed. As a result, the vendor representative has been removed from the premises and alternative controls are being implemented.

We deeply regret any concerns as a result of this breach. We have extensive safeguards in place to protect the privacy and security of our patients' health information and we continually review and update our security safeguards.

Because no financial or personal contact information was compromised, we do not anticipate any adverse effects as a result of this incident. However, in an abundance of caution, impacted patients who receive unsolicited contact regarding their care are encouraged not to respond to questions related to care or financial status. Impacted patients may also want to consider notifying their health plan of this incident and monitoring the Explanation of Benefits statements. Although financial information was not compromised, individuals may be interested in learning more about identity theft and ways to protect personal information by visiting the Federal Trade Commission's website at www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/microsites/idtheft/.

For further questions or additional information regarding this incident, or to determine if you may be impacted by this incident, a dedicated toll-free response line is available at 1-888-921-0520, from 8:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Central Standard Time, Monday through Friday.

Sincerely,

Maureen Holcombe
Program Director, Business Practices
Houston Methodist Hospital