



MR. KIERON TESTART
MLA, KAM LAKE

APR 05 2018

Oral Question 225-18(3): Health Information Act

This letter is in follow up to the Oral Question you raised on March 8, 2018, regarding the Health Information Act.

The Department of Health and Social Services (Department) is committed to ensuring the continued protection and privacy of personal health information, as well as promoting a culture of privacy across the Northwest Territories (NWT) health and social services system. The Department carefully considered the importance of protecting the personal health information in the custody and control of our health and social services professionals as health custodians, and implemented these considerations during the development of the *Health Information Act* (HIA). The HIA sets out the obligations of health and social service providers to protect the personal health information of the individuals they serve.

The health and social services system has over 70 health and social services information systems currently in use across various regions of the NWT. These include legacy systems that were implemented separately in the regions. As we transform service delivery to reflect one delivery system, and as we invest in new information systems, we are gradually replacing those legacy systems with consolidated systems and more current technology that supports new privacy and security requirements. This is a gradual process. As an example, there previously were two separate Electronic Medical Records (EMR) information systems – one in Yellowknife and one in Hay River. To enable improvements in continuity of patient care and sharing of information across regional boundaries, we have replaced those two separate systems with one Territorial EMR.

The Department has worked to gradually implement the use of the Territorial EMR to sites across the NWT, which includes sites that previously only had paper records and required, for example, faxing patient records to other sites where the patient was presenting for care. These patient records are now available in a timely and secure way to authorized providers where and when they need access to the information, enabling more informed decision making, and improving patient care and safety.

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The MediPatient System is a hospital based system with functionality very different from an EMR. An EMR typically supports primary community care settings. There are currently four separate legacy MediPatient information systems in the NWT – one in Inuvik, one in Hay River, one in Fort Smith and one at the Stanton Territorial Hospital. The MediPatient information systems were purchased over 17 years ago.

This MediPatient system will not be replaced with the Territorial EMR given those two systems are designed to support very different clinical care functions. For example, the MediPatient system supports patient registration at the hospital and connects to the pharmacy and supports pharmacy functions in the hospital. When funding is available, we will gradually replace the four separate aging MediPatient information systems with one hospital information system. When we make that investment, we will be investing in technology that is more current and more robust in terms of privacy requirements.

In compliance with the HIA, the Department is ensuring the privacy of patient personal health information in the following ways:

- A series of new Privacy Policies were put in place in May 2017 throughout the health and social services system to comply with the HIA, addressing needs such as privacy breaches, privacy impact assessments, mandatory training and mobile devices.
- A comprehensive privacy compliance manual, the HIA Guide, was released in 2017, providing health information custodians with extensive self-directed training and tools for safeguarding the personal health information of their patients and clients.
- Public awareness materials about clients' rights under the HIA were published to meet the Information and Privacy Commissioner's recommendations and have been installed in waiting rooms of health information custodians across the Territories.
- The Department also launched a website to inform individuals about how the HIA protects their health information, along with other resources:
<http://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/en/services/protecting-your-health-information>.

- Since June 2015, the Department has delivered 57 territory-wide HIA training sessions to 373 people working in the health system, and the Authorities have been training their providers as well.
- New privacy training modules are being delivered to all employees across the health and social services system to meet the Mandatory Training Policy annual training requirement.

As stated in the House, I look forward to seeing the Report and Recommendations of the Standing Committee on Government Operations from their review of the 2016-17 Information and Privacy Commissioner's Report.

I will work with my colleague, the Minister of Justice, to respond to the committee's report.

Thank you.



Glen Abernethy
Minister of Health and Social Services

c Mr. Tim Mercer
Clerk of the Legislative Assembly

Mr. David Hastings
Legislative Coordinator
Department of Executive and Indigenous Affairs