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Notice Under Federal Regulations

[DATELINE] – WellMed recently became aware of a privacy issue affecting some patients in the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

On July 27, 2022, WellMed learned that one of its physicians, who has since left WellMed, obtained some patient medical records with the intent to contact individuals to become patients at his new clinic. This occurred between February 6, 2022 and May 17, 2022. Information contained in the patient records included demographic information (name, date of birth, mailing address, phone number, email address), health insurance information (payer name, health plan identifier) and medical information (medical record number, providers, diagnosis, treatments, medications and laboratory results). This incident did not involve disclosure of individuals' Social Security number, driver's license number or any financial account information.

WellMed regrets this incident and any inconvenience or concern that it may cause. Upon discovery, it took prompt action to investigate the matter. As part of its investigation, WellMed identified the medical records, confirmed the information was secure, caused the return or deletion of the information from the physician, and stopped further unauthorized outreach to patients based on the use of the information. We have also recovered all the information.

As a precaution against any potential misuse of information, the practice advises those affected to regularly monitor their health care statements for any unfamiliar activity. Any suspicious activity should immediately be reported to their health plan or other relevant institution.

Additionally, a dedicated toll-free hotline has been established to help answer any questions and can be reached at 1-888-781-9355 on Monday through Friday, 8:00 am – 5:00 pm CST.

WellMed takes this matter very seriously and is committed to protecting the privacy and security of patients' personal health information. WellMed is reinforcing its existing policies and practices with employees and evaluating additional safeguards to help prevent a similar incident from occurring in the future.

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What happened?

On July 27, 2022, we learned that an employee, who has since left WellMed, obtained some patient medical records with the intent to directly or indirectly solicit individuals as patients at his new clinic. We believe this incident occurred on or between February 6, 2022 and May 17, 2022.

What information was contained in the files?

Information contained in the patient records included demographic information (name, date of birth, mailing address, phone number, email address), health insurance information (payer name, health plan identifier) and medical information (medical record number, providers, diagnosis, treatments, medications and laboratory results). This incident did not involve disclosure of individuals' Social Security number, drivers license number or any financial account information.

How did this happen?

Protecting confidential patient information entrusted to us is a key priority for our practice. The investigation showed that the physician employee, who has since left WellMed, obtained patient medical records with the intent to directly or indirectly solicit individuals as a patient at his new clinic. The unauthorized removal of WellMed patient medical records is a violation of federal HIPAA regulations, state privacy statutes, as well as WellMed's internal policies and employment agreements.

What actions have you taken against the employee?

The individual was no longer an employee at the time this incident was discovered. The unauthorized removal of WellMed patient medical records is a violation of federal HIPAA regulations, state privacy statutes, as well as WellMed's internal policies and employment agreements. We have notified affected patients, as well as relevant authorities.

How will patients know if they are affected by this incident?

Those affected by this privacy incident are being notified by mail between September 23, 2022 and September 30, 2022.

Why did it take so long to notify individuals?

As soon as we became aware of this incident (July 27, 2022), we launched an investigation to determine the facts. Unfortunately, this process took time. We deeply regret this incident and any concerns it may cause anyone.

Don't you have any controls on who can access PHI?

Protecting confidential patient information entrusted to us is a key priority for our practice. Caregivers and authorized staff use this information to administer patient care and other administrative needs. We are deeply disappointed by the actions of this former physician employee and regret any concern it may have caused anyone.

What are you doing to prevent this from happening again?

The clinic takes this matter seriously and is reinforcing its existing policies and practices with employees and evaluating additional safeguards to help prevent a similar incident from occurring in the future. We deeply regret this incident and any concern it may cause anyone.

What actions are you taking to support affected individuals?

Those affected by this privacy incident are being notified by mail on between September 23, 2022 and September 30, 2022. As a precaution, we do advise those affected to monitor their health statements for any unusual activity and ask they immediately report anything unusual to their health plan.

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