



Information and Privacy  
Commissioner of Ontario

Commissaire à l'information et à la  
protection de la vie privée de l'Ontario

News Release

January 28, 2015

## **Is it worth it? The consequences of snooping on health records**

**TORONTO, ON** – While the vast majority of people working in Ontario's health sector respect patient privacy, there is still a small minority that have not gotten the message. Recently, there have been a number of privacy breaches where personal health information (PHI) was accessed by health professionals for unauthorized purposes. Whether out of curiosity, personal gain or simple concern about the health of friends and family, snooping through medical records can have devastating consequences for patients, health professionals and the health system as a whole.

To address this issue, the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario (IPC) is hosting an International Privacy Day event – commemorating the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Personal Health Information Protection Act* – today at St. Michael's Hospital featuring a panel hosted by the Deputy Minister of Health, Dr. Bob Bell. Key stakeholders from across the health care spectrum will examine the challenges and solutions to unauthorized access, and bring attention to the serious consequences for those who invade patient privacy.

To build on the momentum of the event, the IPC is launching an educational campaign, beginning with a new guidance document for the health sector, [\*Detecting and Deterring Unauthorized Access to Personal Health Information\*](#). It examines the potential consequences of unauthorized access and outlines best practices for minimizing the risk. The campaign also poses the question, "[\*Is it worth it?\*](#)" to those who would contemplate accessing PHI without authorization and in contravention of health privacy legislation. A number of free materials are available including posters, a computer monitor wrap and even a video, all featuring stark messages about the possible consequences of snooping, including fines and prosecutions, termination by the employer, and disciplinary action by regulatory colleges and professional associations.

Quote:

"For those who would consider violating the privacy of patients, I want them to think twice and ask themselves if it is worth it. Of all the information that is collected about us, our health information is among the most sensitive. This is why it needs to be vigorously protected. I am grateful that today's panel have given their time to speak about such an important issue. I am looking forward to working with all the stakeholders in the spirit of cooperation because I believe that by working together, we can find a way to minimize the risk of these kinds of privacy breaches happening."

- Brian Beamish, Acting Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario



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**EVENT DETAILS**

**Date & Time:** Wednesday, January 28, 2015  
8:30 to 11:30 a.m.

**Location:** St. Michael's Hospital  
Li Ka Shing Knowledge Centre  
209 Victoria Street, Toronto

The event will also be webcast [here](#) on the Ontario Telemedicine Network. No registration required.

For more information, please visit [www.ipc.on.ca](http://www.ipc.on.ca)

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