

Dr. Donald Cook

From: Heather Predham
Sent: Tuesday, July 26, 2005 9:59 AM
To: Terry Gulliver; Dr. Donald Cook
Subject: FW:

Hi,

I'm cleaning out my mailbox and this is the article I mentioned to you a couple of weeks ago.....I'm sure you have heard of it by now.....

Heather

-----Original Message-----

From: Lucy McDonald [mailto:lucym@nlchi.nl.ca]

Sent: Monday, July 11, 2005 2:44 PM

To: Susan Bourgeois; Agnes Butler; Bev White; Debbie Whalen; Devon Goulding; Faye Drodge; Heather Predham; Jean Sheppard; Josee Dumas; Judy Lynn Wiseman; Kelli O'Brien; Marguerite Foote; Marina Fry; Marjorie Learning; Richard Power

Subject:

2,000 patients hit by lab test mix-up

Doctors worried as CHR shuts database after two-month glitch

Michelle Lang

Calgary Herald

Monday, July 11, 2005

A computer glitch that showed incorrect lab test results for 2,000 Calgarians over a two-month period this summer has physicians worried some patients might be receiving the wrong medication or treatment.

The Calgary Health Region announced Sunday that an Internet database -- which physicians use to view lab work such as blood and urine tests -- mixed up results between patients and posted records under the wrong names.

Officials are now contacting the offices of nearly 400 doctors and other health providers who saw the incorrect records, to ensure patients are receiving proper treatment.

"We're doing this in the interest of safety," said Dr. Chris Eagle, chief clinical officer for the CHR. "We don't know what the doctors did after they looked at the information or how it impacted care."

Yet Eagle urged patients to continue taking their medication as prescribed, unless they are otherwise advised by their physician. He said the computer malfunction affected only a small percentage of results from the 1.5 million tests conducted every month in Calgary.

News of the erroneous lab results sparked widespread concern around Alberta, with everyone from Health Minister Iris Evans to opposition critics to doctors groups weighing in.

"It's a big worry," said Dr. Michael Giuffre, president of the Calgary Regional Medical Staff Association.

"The worry would be if you had a normal result, that it might not really be a normal result and patients wouldn't receive the appropriate treatment."

Sunday's announcement comes as the CHR ramps up its patient safety efforts following the deaths last year of two Calgarians who were given the wrong medication.

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Bart Wassing, 53, and Kathleen Prowse, 83, died at Foothills Hospital in early 2004 when they were given potassium chloride instead of sodium chloride.

This summer's lab report mix-up, however, carries a low risk of any serious medical error, according to CHR officials, because critical tests are called into doctor's offices and most unusual results are repeated.

It appears problems with the Internet database -- known as the Lab Test Results History -- began during an upgrade to a Calgary Laboratory Services' computer program.

The CHR believes errors in the system started May 1 and continued undetected until two physicians complained recently of unusual lab results.

Officials shut down the database on July 6 and say it will remain off while they investigate. Although Eagle said the region believes it has found the cause of the glitch, investigators must still probe why the error was missed and what additional safety measures are needed.

CHR will follow up with the 378 health-care providers who accessed the 2,000 records to ensure doctors have correct lab tests for patients.

While some doctors use the Lab Test Results History to access lab results, the region said most results are delivered directly to physicians by fax and e-mail and they weren't affected by the error.

"This isn't something where every person in the public who has had a lab test in the last month needs to think there's a problem with (their) care," said Eagle.

The CHR has notified Alberta's health minister and the province's information and privacy commissioner of the problem, although the authority said the error does not affect patient privacy.

Mark Kastner, a spokesman with Evans' office, said the minister is concerned about the error and plans to examine what is being done to rectify it.

"Is this something that could happen elsewhere in the province? We have to take a hard look at what occurred here," said Kastner.

Liberal party health critic Laurie Blakeman called the computer problem a "right royal mess" and said it shows the need to proceed cautiously with electronic health records as the province transforms Albertans' medical information into a digital format.

She noted, for example, an Alberta government datatape containing health information for 672,316 people was lost 4 1/2 months ago and still hasn't been found.

"There's great potential for good with electronic health records, but there's also great potential for harm," said Blakeman.

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