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Nationwide Survey Reveals Privacy Concerns Impact Healthcare Decisions among Australian Patients and Outcomes of Patient Care

Report details opportunities for care providers to change the course of care through Privacy by Design principles and transparent communication with patients about privacy.


FairWarning® commissioned an independent firm to execute a nationwide survey to examine how privacy concerns impact patients’ healthcare decisions and more specifically measure to what degree privacy considerations influence from whom, when, where patients seek care, and what information they disclose, thereby affecting the care they receive. This survey is the latest in a series of national findings that includes the US, UK, France and Canada.

The Australian Patient Privacy Survey results reveal that the impact of patient privacy is far greater than just a legal and ethical responsibility to protect patients. In fact, concerns over patient privacy affect the flow of information to providers to use in the diagnosis and care of their patients, as evidenced by some statistics found in the survey:

- 49.1% of Australian patients stated they have withheld or would withhold information from their care provider based on privacy concerns
- 38.2% stated they have or would postpone seeking care for a sensitive medical condition due to privacy concerns
- More than 2 out of 5 Australian patients, 43.5% indicated they would seek care outside of their community due to privacy concerns, with 28.0% indicating they would travel substantial distances, 50 kilometers or more, to avoid being treated at a hospital they did not trust, in order to keep sensitive information confidential, and
- 61.9% of Australian patients reported that if there were serious or repeated breaches of patients' personal information at a hospital where they received treatment, it would reduce their confidence in the quality of healthcare offered by the hospital.

By withholding medical information, Australian patients are impacting the care received and hence the outcome. Accurate information is the bedrock upon which physicians assess medical conditions, and hence determines the treatment patients receive. When this information is withheld or even falsified, fundamental treatment assumptions are impacted.

The survey as a whole reveals that care providers have an opportunity to change the course of patient care by utilizing best practices for protecting patient privacy and initiating a dialog with patients regarding how they proactively protect patient privacy.

Survey respondents were also very clear about their expectations with regards to patient privacy protections. Australian patients expect healthcare providers and hospital executives to
aggressively protect patient privacy. Patients have a significant negative response when privacy violations occur and expect healthcare executives to be held accountable for breaches.

- 97.1% of Australian patients think that healthcare providers have a legal and ethical responsibility to protect patients’ medical records and private information from being breached
- 82.5% of patients agreed that patient data security should be regularly discussed at board meetings
- 89.3% agreed that where there are significant risks of privacy breaches, the chief executives and top management should take appropriate action to minimize or eliminate the risks
- 76.3% of Australian respondents stated that chief executives and top managers need to do more to stop unauthorized access to medical records
- 85.2% stated that healthcare providers should currently monitor who looks at medical records and detect unauthorized access to personal information

“Patient treatment in modern healthcare is entirely information-based. Any friction in the free flow of information between care providers and patients, such as that caused by privacy concerns, prevents the patient from receiving the best possible care. This survey reveals that there is more work to be done to enable the free flow of pertinent medical information, and thus the best patient care outcomes,” says Kurt Long, Founder and CEO of FairWarning®.

FairWarning® draws from its experience of its customers in who represent nearly 900 hospitals and 3,000 clinics across the UK, USA, Canada and Europe, including the country of Scotland.

For a full copy of the survey results and methodology, visit http://www.FairWarning.com/Australia/whitepapers/2012-04-WP-AUSTRALIA-PATIENT-SURVEY.pdf

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**About FairWarning, Inc.**

FairWarning® is the inventor and global leader in appliance-based software solutions which monitor and protect patient privacy in electronic health records enabling healthcare providers and health information exchanges to confidentially connect physicians, clinics, patients and affiliates. FairWarning®’s turnkey privacy auditing solutions are compatible with healthcare applications from every major vendor including Allscripts, Cerner, Epic, GE, McKesson, MEDITECH, Siemens, and many others. Customers consider FairWarning® privacy auditing solutions essential for compliance with healthcare privacy regulations such as ARRA HITECH privacy and meaningful use criteria, HIPAA, EU Data Protection, UK Freedom of Information Act, California SB 541 and AB 211, Texas HB 300, Massachusetts CMR 201 and Canadian provincial healthcare privacy law. For more information on FairWarning®, please visit http://www.FairWarning.com or email Solutions@FairWarning.com.