UCLA Hit with Nearly $900,000 Fine in Celebrity Medical Records Data Breach Case

July 7, 2011 â€“ The University of California Los Angeles Health System has been hit with an $865,000 fine stemming from employee snooping into the medical records of patients who were also Hollywood celebrities. The incidents began in 2005 and continued through 2009.

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The State of California originally began an investigation into reported data breaches by employees of UCLA health system in early 2009 after a new California law went into effect that imposed escalating fines on hospitals for not protecting patient data. That investigation led to a $95,000 fine.

At the very same time that the California investigation began, federal investigators started an HHS inquiry about HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) violations. HIPAA requires strict adherence to rules protecting patient data.

HHS investigators determined that employees at UCLA repeatedly viewed the medical records of a number of celebrity patients without having any reason to do so. In one case, involving Farah Fawcett, an employee pleaded guilty to stealing data related to her illness and then selling it to the press.

As a result of the settlement between UCLA and HHS, the hospital has agreed to retrain staff, establish and implement privacy policies and report on their progress to federal regulators for the next three years. The hospital is also being required to submit a report to regulators detailing its plans to prevent any future breaches in patient privacy.

byJim Malmberg
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