

From the University of Mississippi Medical Center Division of Public Affairs

UMMC, MSDH INFORM PATIENTS OF PERSONAL HEALTH INFORMATION BREACH

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Editor's note: Dr. James Keeton will be available for media interviews today from 10:15 to 11 a.m.

JACKSON, Miss. – The University of Mississippi Medical Center and the Mississippi State Department of Health are informing nearly 1,500 participants in research studies of a breach of their personal health information.

A UMMC faculty member had been assigned a laptop for use in the studies. On Oct. 31, an UMMC employee reported that the laptop used for storing participants' personal health information was stolen from the clinic.

The laptop contained databases of information collected for certain research studies. The databases were password protected. The first database stored health information of patients who had been seen at a MSDH clinic located in the Jackson Medical Mall Thad Cochran Center. MSDH has confirmed that patients who agreed to participate in a study at the clinic gave permission for UMMC to use their personal health information.

The first database, involving about 1,400 patients, included medical record numbers, age, sex, race, zip code and blinded lab results. The information did not include patient names, addresses, Social Security numbers, or any financial information. Though it is possible for patients to be identified, the odds of it occurring are extremely low based on how the information is labeled in the database.

UMMC and MSDH are working together to notify these 1,400 patients impacted by the breach through letters mailed Dec. 19.

A second smaller database also was contained on the laptop and included sensitive protected health information of approximately 75 UMMC patients. These patients are being contacted directly by UMMC.

"We take any breach of patients' personal health information very seriously, and we apologize for this occurrence. We are reviewing our study procedures to prevent this from happening again," said Dr. James Keeton, UMMC vice chancellor for health affairs.

The laptop theft occurred when UMMC employees failed to follow departmental guidelines and left the laptop unsecured for a short period of time. Since then, disciplinary actions have been taken against the responsible employees.

Despite vigorous efforts, attempts to recover the stolen laptop have been unsuccessful. The clinic has safeguards in place to ensure the privacy and security of all patient health information, when procedures are properly followed.

For more information, patients notified of the breach may call UMMC toll free at 1-855-241-2575 between 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m. They also can email inquiries to hipaaprivacy@umc.edu.

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Please forward this message to colleagues who might be interested. If you wish to be removed from this list or know of a colleague to add, send an e-mail message to: LAGriffin@umc.edu.

The University of Mississippi Medical Center, located in Jackson, is the state's only academic medical center. University of Mississippi Health Care represents the clinical programs of the Medical Center and includes University Hospitals and Health System and University Physicians, the faculty group practice. UMMC encompasses five health science schools, including medicine, nursing, health related professions, dentistry and graduate studies, as well as the site where University of Mississippi pharmacy students do their clinical training. The Medical Center's threefold mission is to educate tomorrow's health-care professionals, conduct innovative research to improve human health, and to provide the highest quality care available to the state's citizens. A major goal of the Medical Center is the improvement of the health of Mississippians and the elimination of health disparities. For more information, contact the Division of Public Affairs at 601-984-1100 or visit us on the Web at <http://publicaffairs.umc.edu/>