



OFFICE OF THE  
INFORMATION &  
PRIVACY COMMISSIONER  
for British Columbia

Protecting privacy. Promoting transparency.

**Statement**

**June 14, 2016**

**Statement from B.C. Privacy Commissioner regarding improper access of health records**

**VICTORIA**—Information and Privacy Commissioner Elizabeth Denham issued the following statement about a privacy breach involving the improper access of health records:

“On April 22, 2016, Island Health notified my office of a privacy breach alleging that two employees improperly accessed electronic health records. As a result, we began monitoring Island Health’s investigation and response to the breach. Island Health subsequently determined that the employees had breached the privacy of some patients.

“These types of cases are very concerning because they involve sensitive, personal health data – some of the most sensitive of all of our personal information. It is troubling when an employee who has legitimate access to personal information on the job abuses that privilege. Secure and controlled access to personal data is fundamental to building and maintaining trust in the health care system.

“I recommended to the Special Committee that recently reviewed the *Freedom of Information and Privacy Act* (“FIPPA”) that B.C.’s privacy law be strengthened to include penalties for this type of unauthorized access, and the Committee accepted that recommendation. I note that the province of Saskatchewan is making it an offence for health-care workers to snoop on someone’s personal records without needing the information.

“My office is working with Island Health to help them prevent privacy breaches like this one in the future.”

Elizabeth Denham  
Information and Privacy Commissioner for British Columbia

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