

TITLE: STOLEN LAPTOP

PRINCIPAL SPEAKERS: Michelle Chung, CBC Toronto
Ann Cavoukian, Ontario Information and Privacy
Commissioner

(Michelle Chung)

It started innocently enough, a doctor taking work home on a laptop. But then a thief broke into his car and stole the computer, containing the health information of almost three thousand patients, maybe yours.

That's what happened to a researcher at the Hospital For Sick Children in early January. With only a log in password, that thief could unlock those records. The province's Privacy Commissioner says that threat to your privacy could be easily prevented.

(Ann Cavoukian)

If you're taking anything out of the office on a remote device, a laptop, a PDA, you encrypt it if it's personally identifiable, full stop.

(Michelle Chung)

Ann Cavoukian says Sick Kids hasn't been doing enough to keep patients records private. And she's putting any organization that collects personal data on notice.

(Ann Cavoukian)

You have a duty of care towards your customers, towards your patients that you're going to protect their health information, their consumer information, whatever information.

(Michelle Chung)

The hospital says the information that was stolen would be difficult for anyone but a doctor to understand. But Sick Kids says it takes Cavoukian's recommendations seriously and has begun to review the way it handles patient information.

(Unknown Female)

Obviously we have a lot to learn and have learned a lot from this incident in where we can improve in, in the way information is managed that gets out of the hospital.

(Michelle Chung)

This privacy consultant says his research shows laptops are stolen for the laptop itself, not for the information it holds. So the risk that thieves may be stealing your records may be small. But John Jager says the fall out for companies can be huge.

(John Jager)

The risk of notification for the company is in fact bad publicity. The cost of notifying it's customers. But there's also a risk for the customer in the sense that there may be all of this notification for a risk that doesn't really, that doesn't really exist.

(Michelle Chung)

Cavoukian says those odds aren't good enough. She says if there's a threat, any threat that someone could steal your data, then the people who collect it have to protect it. As for the standards that she's set out. They apply to all hospitals and doctors across the province. Michelle Chung, CBC News, Toronto.

Transcription prepared by Media Q Inc. exclusively for NSERC