

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

INUVIK HOSPITAL PRIVACY BREACH

February 26, 2018

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, privacy is a fundamental individual right that is under constant threat in this digital era. A reminder of the importance of privacy and the diligence required for government to safeguard the information it collects comes from a recent NWT Information and Privacy Commissioner ruling.

In 2015, a patient at the Inuvik Hospital complained to the CEO of an unwelcome visit from one of the medical clerks who worked there. This complaint touched off a round of investigations that revealed there was "a culture of inappropriately accessing patient information" within the clinic or, in plain language, snooping. The Information and Privacy Commissioner found that there was a poor understanding of privacy in the clinic, poorly administered policies and procedures, poor supervision, and poor orientation for users of the electronic record system. Further, the IPC concluded, "Most likely, there are similar problems in other health facilities as well."

Mr. Speaker, to remedy the situation, the IPC made a number of recommendations. She suggested that there be a designated senior staff person responsible for privacy. He or she would deliver policy development training and supervision on privacy issues. He or she would conduct periodic audits to ensure staff were not snooping.

This privacy complaint was not the first that the hospital has received. In 2012, the IPC investigated a different complaint on the same topic and made a set of recommendations. Some of those recommendations had not been acted on when the second complaint came along three years later. For example, the IPC recommended that each electronic medical record user have a unique user name and password. This recommendation was not followed. This recommendation is repeated in her 2017 report, along with the suggestion that new employees not be granted access to the system until they have been fully informed of privacy and confidentiality issues related to medical records.

A second unimplemented recommendation from 2012 was to grant access to electronic records based on the role that staff had at the hospital. At the time of her report, the Information and Privacy Commissioner found that almost everyone at the Inuvik Hospital had close to full access to the whole system. This recommendation on limitation is also repeated in the 2017 report.

Mr. Speaker, residents of the NWT must have confidence that this government is taking their right to privacy seriously. I will have questions for the Minister of Health and Social Services. Mahsi.