

NWT medical record system doesn't pass muster: privacy commissioner

by Sidney Cohen- February 27, 2018

The MLA for Yellowknife Centre wants to know what the government is doing to ensure patients' medical information is kept private.



Yellowknife Centre MLA Julie Green

Julie Green said in 2015, investigations revealed a culture of “snooping” at the Inuvik Regional Hospital after patients’ medical records were inappropriately accessed. A similar privacy breach was examined in 2012.

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,” Green said Monday.

She said certain recommendations made by the commissioner in subsequent years were not acted upon.

Residents of the NWT must have confidence that this government is taking their right to privacy seriously,” said Green.

In her 2016-17 annual report, Elaine Keenan Bengts, the information and privacy commissioner, states the medical record-keeping system used in the territory does not have the functionality to ensure patients’ rights, guaranteed by the Health Information Act, are being met.

Specifically, she writes, it appears as though none of the medical record systems are capable of masking a patient’s file.

The act grants patients the right to bar one or more healthcare workers from accessing their records.

However Keenan Bengts found that these systems are not set up to block a given health care worker or clerical staffer from viewing a patient’s medical information.

Glen Abernethy, minister of Health and Social Services, said that staff are being trained on the information they are permitted to access under the Health Information Act.

He said that since 2015, more than 373 health care staff have sat in on health information training sessions.

Though Abernethy couldn't say Monday what percentage of staff working for the territory's health authorities have received privacy training, he confirmed that the training is mandatory and being rolled out "as we speak."