

Public Notice Regarding May 2014 Privacy Breach of Patient Information in the IHS Great Plains Area

On May 30, 2014, it was discovered that a file folder containing protected health information from the Indian Health Service (IHS) Rosebud Service Unit in Rosebud, South Dakota, was inadvertently left by an employee in a public area at the Rapid City Service Unit in Rapid City, South Dakota. Both facilities are in the IHS Great Plains Area, which encompasses the states of North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Iowa.

The protected health information that was left in the folder at the Rapid City Service Unit included 620 patient names, Social Security numbers, and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs enrollment information. At this time, the IHS has not received any indication the information has been accessed or used by any unauthorized individuals. The folder was discovered a short time later and was immediately taken to security.

The IHS is committed to safeguarding the privacy of its patients and deeply regrets this incident occurred. In accordance with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA), the IHS has notified the persons involved. On July 16, 2014, the IHS sent letters by first class mail to the affected patients to inform them of the privacy breach and apologize for the incident. In this letter, patients were provided a phone number to call and offered one year of free credit monitoring and reporting services.

An investigation has been completed, and the incident has been referred to management for appropriate action to determine accountability in accordance with the HIPAA regulations. To prevent future occurrences, all Great Plains Area staff will receive additional training in current HIPAA privacy rules.

Patients who received the letter and who have any questions can contact the Great Plains Area HIPAA Coordinator Heather McClane at 605-226-7730, email: heather.mcclane@ihs.gov; or the IHS Headquarters HIPAA Coordinator Williams Tibbitts at 301-443-1116, email: Williams.Tibbitts@ihs.gov.