



**STATE OF WASHINGTON**  
**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND HEALTH SERVICES**  
**WESTERN STATE HOSPITAL**  
9601 Steilacoom Blvd. S.W., Lakewood Washington, 98498-7213 MS W27-19

January 10, 2018

Re: Substitute Service for HIPAA Breach Notification

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) requires the Department of Social and Health Services (Department) to notify potentially affected clients of breaches. A breach was discovered on September 20, 2017, that affected some Western State Hospital (WSH) patients. WSH notified approximately 515 affected patients by mail on November 15, 2017. Approximately 60 of those notifications were returned to WSH as undeliverable. This message constitutes substitute service for those clients we attempted to mail notification to but were unable to reach.

WSH regrets to inform some patients that confidential information regarding you was shared with an unauthorized person. A WSH staff member inadvertently sent an email with your protected health information (PHI) to an incorrect email address. The incident was reported that same day. As a result, PHI identifying you may have been viewed by someone not authorized to see it. Because the program serving you is covered by the HIPAA Privacy Rule, we are notifying you of the breach as required by that rule in 45 CFR 164.404.

Specifically, the following items of PHI may have been exposed:

- Name
- Date of Admission to Western State Hospital (WSH)
- WSH Medical Record Number
- Date of birth
- Diagnosis of infection

We are extremely sorry for this situation and understand it may cause concern. We try very hard to earn your trust, and that includes protecting sensitive information about you. We take client confidentiality very seriously.

There are important things for you to know:

The incident occurred when a WSH staff member was sending a spreadsheet to another staff member who requested the information. The infection prevention employees use the spreadsheet in order to create infection prevention approaches at the hospital. When attempting to send the e-mail, the staff member misdirected the e-mail to the private e-mail address of an individual who had previously been offered employment at the hospital, but does not work at the hospital currently. WSH was able to contact the recipient and the recipient confirmed that the e-mail and attachment containing PHI was deleted.

As a result of this incident, we are requiring the staff member involved to receive further training and close supervision while handling confidential information. We also implemented new procedures to further restrict access to patient information maintained by the hospital. We strive to protect all of our client data and regret any upset to you.

### **What You Can Do**

We do not think that the health information shared is sufficient for someone to steal your identity or impact your credit. However, if you are concerned, you can find information on actions you can take to protect yourself on the websites of the Washington State Office of the Attorney General at: <http://www.atg.wa.gov/identity-theftprivacy> and for the Federal Trade Commission at: <http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/microsites/idtheft/>. We will tell you if we receive any more information that shows your credit or identity may be at risk.

If there is anything we can do to assist you or if you have questions, please contact

Sincerely,

Sharon Bourne  
Western State Hospital  
9601 Steilacoom Blvd. SW  
Tacoma WA 98498  
Ph. 253-756-2762 or toll-free @ 844-461-4443  
[Sharon.bourne@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:Sharon.bourne@dshs.wa.gov)