

St. Charles discovers privacy violation

St. Charles Health System has discovered that a caregiver accessed nearly 2,500 patients' electronic medical records without authorization.

The caregiver said in an interview that she looked at the files out of curiosity. She has since signed an affidavit stating that she has never used or shared any of the confidential patient information for the purpose of committing fraud, financial crimes or other crimes against the patients whose records were among those she viewed.

On January 16, the health system launched an investigation and conducted an audit of all of the patient files accessed by the caregiver. The audit revealed that between October 8, 2014, and January 16, 2017, the caregiver may have reviewed as many as 2,459 files containing patients' names, addresses, dates of birth, health insurance information, driver's license numbers and health information such as diagnoses, physicians' names, medications and treatment information.

"We sincerely apologize to our patients who may have been affected by this incident," said Nicole Hough, vice president of compliance. "We want to provide them with the information they need to understand what happened and what they can do to

guard against possible fraud."

The health system mailed a letter today to those patients who are impacted. The letter includes an explanation of the incident and an offer of credit monitoring and identity restoration services, as well as additional information about how individuals can protect themselves. St. Charles is also in the process of notifying state and federal regulators about the incident.

"St. Charles takes the privacy and security of our patients' personal health information very seriously. We regard the protection of all patient information as part of our commitment to providing excellent care," Hough said. "The health system is doing everything possible to prevent a similar privacy breach from occurring in the future, including implementing additional medical record audits."

Individuals are encouraged to remain vigilant against incidents of identity theft and fraud, to review their account statements and to monitor their credit reports for suspicious activity. A confidential call center has also been established to answer questions about this incident. The call center phone number is 1-855-836-0069 and is available Monday through Saturday, 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. EST.

Judge: Four in standoff guilty

PORTLAND (AP) — A federal judge in Oregon found four men guilty Tuesday of misdemeanor counts of trespassing and tampering with government vehicles and equipment during last year's high-profile takeover of a wildlife refuge after a bench trial that was overshadowed by the conviction of the same men by a jury on more serious felony charges.

U.S. District Judge Anna Brown found defendants Jason Patrick, Darryl Thorn, Duane Ehmer and Jake Ryan guilty of the lesser crimes 11 days after the men were convicted by a Portland jury of charges ranging from conspiracy to possession of firearms in a federal facility. Patrick was also found guilty of destruction and removal of property on Tuesday.

Early in the trial proceedings, Brown separated the misdemeanors from the felonies and pegged them for a bench trial over the objections of the defense, who felt allowing the jury — and not the judge — to consider the lesser charges would have helped their clients.

Patrick, who was part of the initial group that seized the refuge in remote southeastern Oregon, has said he will appeal the case.

They all face years in prison at a sentencing hearing set for next month.

Thorn, Ehmer and Ryan remain free while awaiting sentencing but Patrick chose to turn himself in Tuesday.

The outcome for these four men is sharply different from their fellow occupiers, who were tried in the same court last fall.

Brothers Ammon and Ryan Bundy and five others were acquitted of conspiracy charges by a different jury in a verdict that was seen as a major upset of the prosecution.

But the U.S. attorney's office refused to dismiss charges against the second round of lesser-known defendants.

Dozens of people occupied the refuge from Jan. 2 to Feb. 11, 2016 to show support for two Oregon ranchers who were imprisoned for setting fires on federal rangeland.

The defendants said their takeover was a constitutionally protected protest against federal control of public lands in the western U.S.

The armed crowd was allowed to come and go for several weeks as authorities tried to avoid bloodshed seen in past standoffs at Waco, Texas, and Ruby Ridge,

Idaho.

Prosecutors argued in both cases that the defendants had conspired to overrun the refuge and occupy it — and in doing so, they had prevented federal workers from doing their jobs there.

The Bundys and other key figures were arrested in a Jan. 26, 2016 traffic stop outside the refuge that ended when police fatally shot occupation spokesman Robert "LaVoy" Finicum. Most occupiers of the refuge left shortly after Finicum's death, including the four defendants in the current trial, but a few hold-outs remained for a few more weeks before surrendering.

A total of 26 people were indicted on the conspiracy charge.

In addition to the 11 who appeared in the two trials, 14 pleaded guilty and charges were dropped against one man.

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