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SACRAMENTO – The Department of State Hospitals (DSH) today announced a privacy breach at Coalinga State Hospital involving approximately 1,738 current and former patients occurred when an employee provided confidential information about them to the United States District Court, Eastern District of California. The breach occurred on July 21, 2013, October 12, 2016, and August 27, 2019. The employee gave the court patient rosters containing patient names, case numbers, birth dates, legal commitments, admission dates, unit numbers and gender to allow the court clerk to make a determination as to whether certain of those patients were eligible for waiver of fees for filing a lawsuit.

While it is not a breach of patient privacy to provide a patient's name and other confidential information to the court for the purpose of providing a public benefit, DSH must abide by federal and state privacy laws, which prohibit releasing personally identifiable information and protected health information of patients who never filed a lawsuit with the court. These laws also prohibit providing more than the minimum amount of information necessary for the provision of the public benefit of determining eligibility for filing fee waivers.

The data breach was discovered August 12, 2021, when the court contacted DSH to request an updated patient roster.

The patient roster was not released beyond court personnel or used for any purpose apart from making an eligibility determination for a public benefit by the District Court, and DSH has received confirmation that the court has destroyed all copies of the rosters.

DSH is notifying the patients and former patients who are affected by this breach and providing them with information about medical privacy. In fiscal year 2018/2019, DSH received funding and has since implemented a statewide privacy program to provide employees with further clarity, education, and awareness regarding data protection.

In accordance with federal and state privacy laws, the breach was reported to the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Civil Rights, the California Office of Information Security, the California Office of Health Information Integrity, the California Highway Patrol, the California Department of Public Health, and the California Attorney General's Office. The Notice of Data Breach can be found on this page of the DSH website: https://www.dsh.ca.gov/Breach_Notice_Coalinga.html

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