

**Australian Medical Association Limited**

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**AMA WORKING WITH GENERAL PRACTICE TO ENSURE PATIENT PRIVACY**

The AMA acknowledges the release of the privacy assessment report undertaken by the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC), which examined the privacy policies of 40 general practices across Australia.

Chair of the AMA Council of General Practice (AMACGP), Dr Brian Morton, who runs a busy suburban general practice in Sydney, said today that patient privacy is a priority for every GP and every general practice.

Dr Morton said that the OAIC report showed that some general practices needed to do more to ensure that they had a privacy policy that was *fully* compliant with the Australian Privacy Principles (APP). The report does not suggest that patient privacy had been in any way compromised by any of the practices.

“Privacy law is a very complex area and this report, which looked at a small sample of practices, is an important reminder that general practices should review and update their privacy policies on a regular basis,” Dr Morton said.

The OAIC report provides some useful guidance for GPs, highlighting how practices could improve their privacy policies, including:

- how easily policies could be read and comprehended;
- the provision of appropriate contact information, and provisions in the event an individual wanted to access or correct information held about them, or make a complaint;
- identifying the kinds of personal information collected and held, as well as why and how it is collected and held;
- describing the reasonable steps the practice took to protect patient information, and how a privacy complaint is dealt with; and
- how health information (including Individual Health Identifiers and prescribed medicines) is collected, used, or disclosed through the MyHealth Record system and the Electronic Transfer of Prescriptions (eTP) service.

Dr Morton said that patient privacy is fundamental to the trust relationship between doctors and patients, and practices go to great lengths to ensure the privacy of their patients’ records.

“General practices are serious about protecting patient privacy, but the report sends a clear signal that we can do better, including with getting all the paperwork right,” Dr Morton said.

“The AMA has already acted upon the concerns of the OAIC, updating our own Privacy and Health Record Resource Handbook to include an updated privacy policy template to guide practices when writing or updating their privacy policy.

“This resource is available on the AMA website at <https://ama.com.au/article/privacy-and-health-record-resource-handbook-medical-practitioners-private-sector>

“The AMA will continue to work with practices to help them to navigate privacy laws, and have in place the right policies and processes to satisfy their legal and ethical obligations,” Dr Morton said.

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