



The Hon. GREG HUNT MP

Minister for Health
Minister for Sport

TRANSCRIPT

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INTERVIEW WITH LEON BYNER FIVEAA

E&OE...

Topics: Incorrect Adelaide Advertiser article regarding My Health Record

LEON BYNER:

Let's talk with the Federal Health Minister Greg Hunt. Greg, thank you for coming on today.

GREG HUNT:

Pleasure Leon.

LEON BYNER:

Are you aware of these accusations and if you are, have you done any digging to find out what's happened?

GREG HUNT:

Well yes I am and of course I'm in the job just on two months and we've already made very significant progress in ensuring that there is real privacy.

And the best advice that I have is with 4.7 million users, so that's a very significant proportion of the Australian population, there are no examples of unauthorised access.

And indeed there are the highest levels of security. So there was a story yesterday that was flat plain wrong, because I did make immediate inquiries about it.

Flat plain wrong, which alleged that over half a million medical professionals could just have access to personal records. They can't.

One, is they have to have authorisation, two, like a bank account, you've got to have access to a person's private secure PIN.

So it's physically impossible and then, in addition to that, there are criminal sanctions for unauthorised breaches.

So the story was just, occasionally you see a story which is flat plain wrong. Now what happened under Labor when they headed it up, I don't think they made a very good start. Whereas that now, we've got 4.7 million people who are involved.

And increasingly you're finding that this is helping to assist with people avoiding adverse reactions to drugs, where they may have a particular drug and not everybody knows their history.

Could I tell you all the things that happened to me as a child? If you don't have your parents around, then there's nobody who's got that corporate memory.

But if you build this up, then if somebody is allergic to particular drugs, then in an emergency department that can save lives and prevent lives. It can ensure that you don't have to go and do the same test over and over again.

So it becomes entirely at the discretion of any individual. No individual has to have one of these and any individual has the complete protection of the law and the practical protection of a PIN in just the same way as you do with your online banking.

LEON BYNER:

Minister, when the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner, assessed privacy risks to patient information held by seven GP practices in Victoria and New South Wales, it found the clinics were at medium to high risk of breaching privacy laws when using the My Health Record. Has this been sorted?

GREG HUNT:

We are in contact with the Privacy and Information Commissioner. Could you just give me the date on that?

LEON BYNER:

I understand this would've been a couple of years ago, okay. So what we want to know is ...

GREG HUNT:

Yep, so, some years ago. And my understanding is I'm pretty sure, I thought that was the case you were referring to, is that that was dealt with immediately at the time.

Again though, no case of breach. It was just a case that they wanted additional security in the practices themselves. And there was action taken at the time.

And I've reviewed it very closely on coming in. And in fact we've had the support of all of the states and territories, who believe that this will save lives, protect lives and improve medical treatment.

The Labor Party introduced it and had demanded the current system be brought forward. We've been careful in bringing it forward.

And then both the Australian Medical Association and what's called the Royal Australian College of GPs, so the GPs principal body, have all been very, very supportive.

LEON BYNER:

I need to clarify this. So is it true that occupational therapists working for an employer, doctors working for insurance companies, the dietician and optometrist or dentist or their staff can view the record and see if individuals have an STD, for example, mental illness, or something else? No?

GREG HUNT:

Not unless they've got your PIN, and not unless they've got your consent. So if the story was written as if an OT in Perth could just look up Leon Byner and view your record. That's false.

So a medical practitioner or anybody can only see a record with the permission and the detailed personal information, in other words, your PIN and other things from the patient.

So that claim in the article was just flat, plain, false, wrong, incorrect, deceptive, misleading. I can use a number of other adjectives, but you get the drift.

LEON BYNER:

Yeah. So there are no privacy risks at all?

GREG HUNT:

Look, you can never be too vigilant with privacy, in my view, and so that's one of the things that I've consistently since coming to office, again, only two months ago, sought advice on to see if there are any gaps, to see if there's anything that we can strengthen.

I've got to say, I have been pleasantly pleased at the way in which the privacy levels are extremely high.

So not only are there the standard 100 per cent of people have a full automatic privacy protection, but more than that you can also limit even further the detail that's available.

So it may be that somebody has something in their past which they don't want even their GP to have access to. So you can say the GP can have access to my system, but I can keep certain parts of it private.

LEON BYNER:

Okay. If people listening today don't have one of these, what advantage is it to them to opt in?

GREG HUNT:

So what it does is it gives you a lifetime health record. So if you're having tests, you might be having x-rays, you might be having pathology tests, you might have a diagnosis, and many people won't be aware of five and 10 years ago what a particular illness or condition was, and that's why the AMA and the College of GPs are extremely strong supporters of the system and the opt-out model.

So, and also all of the states. So again, though, any individual has complete control as to whether they want to participate in the system.

If so, they get the automatic 100 per cent protection of the PIN, the law, and the authorised access only, but even then, they can go even further and prevent any person within the system from accessing, and confine and quarantine their own information.

LEON BYNER:

Alright. While I've got you there, we're getting a Budget soon, and I'm not going to ask you to tell me what's in it, because that would be naïve. But can we expect some major health announcements from the Budget?

GREG HUNT:

Look, I am working very, very constructively with the Australian Medical Association, so the peak body for doctors right across the country, the GP's College, Medicines Australia, and the Pharmacy Guild on good outcomes in each of those areas.

So I won't pre-empt the outcomes, but I'm very hopeful that we'll be able to land very positive steps forward with each of the (inaudible).

Look, at the end of the day, my commitment to Medicare is completely, not just rock solid, but it's a personal passion, and this, mental health, hospitals, and medical research are the four big things that we've picked up.

LEON BYNER:

Alright. While I've got you there, too, I know there are many treatments, antibiotics and others, that are not available for chemists at the moment when doctors prescribe them. There is a shortage of drugs. Are you across this?

GREG HUNT:

Which ones in particular are you referring to?

LEON BYNER:

Well, there are those for urinary tract infections. I was talking to my GP the other day, and he said Leon, there's a whole lot of drugs that we would normally prescribe that we physically cannot get into Australia at the moment.

GREG HUNT:

Well, if there are any in particular, I'd love you or your listeners to contact me.

LEON BYNER:

You didn't know?

GREG HUNT:

Well, no, it just depends. There are literally thousands of drugs available in the country, thousands, and I deal with any that come up.

There was one in particular that came up. I spoke with the CEO of a company, and they talked in particular about multiplying by five the volume this year compared with last year, so they were very responsive on that.

So there are literally thousands and thousands of drugs under the PBS, so the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, and if there are any in particular, then I'd be more than happy to speak directly with the companies.

LEON BYNER:

Alright, Greg Hunt, thank you. That's the Federal Health Minister, just clearing up some issues that we had on the show yesterday.

(ENDS)