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Date: 13 December 2007

Statement attributable to Hugh Ross, Chief Executive of Cardiff and Vale NHS Trust

The Trust can confirm a laptop computer was stolen from St Julian's GP surgery in Newport 5th November 2007. This was reported immediately to both the local police and the Diabetic Retinopathy Screening Service (DRSS). A Trust incident report form was completed on the same day and the DRSS began investigations into which patient details were recorded on the computer.

The laptop does not contain any medical information on the patient. The computer stores details of clinic lists which include the patients' name, address, date of birth and contact telephone number. The record also links to an image of the patient's retina. In some instances the patient's NHS number is also recorded. The patient's National Insurance number is not collected or stored on this system.

All Trust computers are password protected to an approved NHS standard to ensure that only NHS staff can access the system. In addition, there are a further two levels of security on this laptop before patient information can be accessed.

I know that 950 patients have definitely been affected by this incident and I am writing to each of them individually to notify them and offer my apologies. It is possible that further patient records, which were due to be deleted, may still be stored on the computer. The Trust has no way of knowing if this is the case unless the laptop can be recovered.

I have initiated an internal investigation into all aspects of the service, including our security measures.

I would like to offer a sincere apology to all patients affected by this theft and reassure them that there are very strong security measures on all our IT systems to prevent confidential information being accessed. This is an isolated incident and we are taking immediate action to try and ensure that it does not happen again.

Notes to Editors

The Diabetic Retinopathy Screening Service is a Welsh Assembly Government funded service, managed by Cardiff and Vale NHS Trust.

The service runs a total of 22 clinics a day, 5 days a week. 25-30 patients are seen in each clinic. The service has screened a total of 150,000 patients across Wales.

Information on all 150,000 patients is held on a central database. When the screening service holds clinics in various locations in the community, staff upload the patient information needed for those clinics onto laptop computers. When the staff return to base, this information is transferred to the central database and deleted from the laptops. Regularly “purging” patient information from the laptops in this way ensures that only a limited number of patient records are stored on the laptop at any given time.

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