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MEDICAL TRIAL

Health privacy scare

The NSW Government has shown breathtaking arrogance by pushing patients into a trial of electronic health records, the state's peak welfare lobby group said today.

The Council of Social Service of NSW urged Health Minister John Hatzistergos to meet the state's privacy commissioner before the trial begins in the Hunter and western Sydney.

NCOSS director Gary Moore said the Government had indicated last week that the trial, which would store patients' records on an electronic database, would be conducted on an opt-out rather than an opt-in basis.

Such a move raised serious concerns about the need to protect patients' privacy, he said.

Last Friday, the minister quietly gazetted a new regulation that exempts health practitioners and public sector agencies from having to obtain consumer consent to participate in trials of this electronic health record, Moore claimed.

NCOSS and several other consumer and community organisations recognise the potential that electronic records transfer can make to better results for patients in hospitals and clients in community health services.

However, NSW Health has shown a breathtaking arrogance by firstly moving the basis of these trials from an opt-in basis for health consumers to an opt-out basis and then refusing to negotiate other legitimate privacy provisions.

NCOSS and other health consumer groups would seek to have the opt-out regulation disallowed. If Hatzistergos would not discuss their privacy concerns, Moore said.

■ Are there too many unnecessary privacy concerns these days? Email syd.talk@mxnet.com.au or SMS 1999 4488.