



UCLA to Pay Fine for Violating Privacy of Patient Records

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Here's a case that opens a window on how tabloid newspapers get intimate details of celebrity's medical lives: They pay hospital employees to rifle through private medical records.

The University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) Health System has agreed to pay the federal government \$865,000 to resolve allegations that its **employees violated patient privacy**, according to investigative journalists at ProPublica.

Between 2005 and 2008, UCLA employees repeatedly snooped in patient medical records, including those of celebrity patients Farah Fawcett, Britney Spears, Michael Jackson and former California first lady Maria Shriver. ProPublica had reported earlier how Fawcett (now deceased) had set up a sting operation to catch leaks to the National Enquirer about her cancer. In 2010, a former UCLA employee pleaded guilty to four counts of illegally reading private and confidential medical records.

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The agreement with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services requires UCLA to train health system employees who have access to patient records, to sanction those who break the rules of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and to assign an independent monitor to assess its compliance for three years.

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