

Godfrey, Debbie HLTH:EX

From: Godfrey, Debbie HLTH:EX
Sent: Friday, October 3, 2014 4:04 PM
To: Wharf, Sandy PREM:EX
Subject: FW: FINAL
Attachments: 2014HLTH0103-001475.pdf

From: Jabs, Ryan GCPE:EX
Sent: Friday, October 3, 2014 4:04 PM
To: Godfrey, Debbie HLTH:EX
Subject: FINAL

Here's the final.

Ryan Jabs
Director of Communications - Ministry of Health
Government Communications and Public Engagement
(250) 952-1889
Cell: [REDACTED] s. 17
Ryan.Jabs@gov.bc.ca



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
2014HLTH0103-001475
October 3, 2014

Ministry of Health

Government apologises to family; reviews HR policy

VICTORIA – Minister of Health Terry Lake has asked his Deputy Minister Stephen Brown to send a letter conveying the government's apology to the family of Roderick MacIsaac for terminating his employment, given his status as a co-op student and under the supervision of ministry staff. In the letter, the government also expresses sympathy and condolences for the stress and sadness that they have endured as a result of Mr. MacIsaac's death in December, 2012.

Mr. MacIsaac was a former co-op employee with the Ministry of Health, whose employment was terminated during the last week of his co-op term, after the ministry investigated a significant privacy breach discovered in the spring of 2012.

The Health Minister remains limited in his ability to comment but some information is publicly available as it appears in the statement of defence that has been filed in provincial court.

There was a series of breaches of data and inappropriate use of private information - and the ministry has a responsibility to protect the private health information of British Columbians.

Deputy Minister Brown reviewed the terminations made in 2012 by the ministry and has determined that serious breaches of policy occurred, but some of the employment terminations were unwarranted or were considered excessive. The deputy's review led to settlements with three employees.

The government has also announced today that the head of the Public Service Agency, Lynda Tarras has been asked to conduct a review of the steps taken to investigate these allegations of inappropriate conduct and practices, and the process taken to arrive at the decision. The information gathered from this review will be used to make recommendations to improve how the public service responds to allegations of employee misconduct in the future.

The Public Service Agency has engaged Marcia McNeil, who is an independent third party, and has a background in labour relations law and investigations. She will use the terms of reference developed by the Public Service Agency to guide her work. (The terms of reference are included in the second backgrounder attached).

The government expects to receive this report by Oct. 31 and will make the report and its recommendations public shortly after.

Media Contact:

Ministry of Health
250 952-1887 (media line)



BACKGROUND

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Timeline

March 28, 2012: The Office of the Auditor General contacted the Ministry of Health to advise that someone had made an allegation about contracting irregularities and inappropriate research grant practices in the Pharmaceutical Services Division.

April 2012: The ministry's Financial and Corporate Services Division conducted staff interviews and looked at the contracts involved in the complaint. As a result of this examination, the ministry decided a formal and in depth investigation was warranted.

May 2012: The ministry began its formal investigation.

Late August-September 2012: The ministry made the decision to terminate the employment of seven employees based on the investigation. The Public Service Act gives the head of the BC Public Service Agency and other deputy ministers, or an individual with delegated authority, the authority to dismiss employees for just cause.

September 2012: The Ministry of Health publicly announced its investigation into allegations of inappropriate conduct, contracting and data-management practices within the ministry, after receiving a complaint through the office of the Auditor General regarding allegations about contracting irregularities and inappropriate research grant practices in the ministry.

January 2013: The ministry released details of three specific privacy breaches that occurred in the previous three years. Following advice from the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, the ministry directly notified 38,000 British Columbians affected by one of the breaches and set up a call centre to respond to calls related to these breaches.

June, 2013: The Information and Privacy Commissioner released a report on her investigation into the privacy breaches that occurred. Her observations included that:

- "Ministry employees were able to download large amounts of personal health data onto unencrypted flash drives and share it with unauthorized persons, undetected."
- "This Office's investigation confirmed that the three disclosures were unauthorized."
- "The disclosures of personal information in the three cases cited above occurred because an employee was not detected as they accessed databases and copied personal information onto unencrypted flash drives."
- "The potential harm was that aspects of the affected individuals' medical history would become known."
- "The circumstances surrounding the breaches present similarities to a pattern of attempts to work around the lengthy approval process that was apparent in the documentation the investigation reviewed. I note that, if this was the case, it does not excuse anyone for obtaining access to personal health data through unauthorized

channels.”

June, 2013: Stephen Brown was appointed Deputy Minister of Health and was directed by the Deputy Minister of the public service John Dyble to review the matters related to the privacy breach and ongoing investigations by the ministry. Upon review, Mr. Brown finalized the investigation, took steps to restore frozen contracts and initiated a process to address terminations of former ministry employees.

June, 2013: The Ministry of Health accepted recommendations made by the Office of the Privacy Commissioner and released the report written by Deloitte, which made recommendations on how the ministry could strengthen its data security practices. The ministry had also accepted the recommendations in the Deloitte report.

October, 2013: The ministry announced new protocols that it had put in place to protect privacy and security of health data, and that it was reinstating its contract with the University of British Columbia’s Therapeutics Initiative

Summer, 2014: The ministry settled with three former employees.

August 2014: Deputy Minister John Dyble and Deputy Minister of the Public Service Agency Lynda Tarras discussed the need to review the processes and practices associated with the way in which HR investigations are conducted in the Public Service.

October, 2014: Minister Terry Lake directed his Deputy Minister Stephen Brown to send a letter extending condolences to family of Roderick MacIsaac.

October, 2014:

Deputy Minister John Dyble formally directed Deputy Minister Lynda Tarras to review government’s human resources procedures related to the termination of employment of Ministry of Health employees in order to provide recommendations that can be applied government-wide.

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Terms of Reference

Intent

This is a review of the public service response to allegations of inappropriate conduct, contracting and data-management practices involving employees and drug researchers for the Ministry of Health in 2012. The purpose is to review the steps taken to investigate these issues and the process taken to arrive at the termination decisions. The information gathered from this review will be used to make recommendations to improve how the public service responds to allegations of employee misconduct in the future.

Background & Context

In May 2012, the Ministry of Health first announced a formal investigation into allegations of contracting irregularities and inappropriate research grant practices in the Pharmaceutical Services Division. The allegations were first received by the Office of the Auditor General and were forwarded to the ministry.

Based on the findings of the internal investigations, the ministry terminated the services of a number of employees.

Objectives

The objectives of this review are to:

- Confirm the actions and events that took place during the investigation from the point at which the allegations were received through to the point at which the termination decisions were made and executed.
- Assess the human-resource and investigation procedures and practices utilized in responding to the allegations.
- Make recommendations where required for improving the procedures and practices for HR and management staff to follow in responding to these types of matters.

Scope

The following areas are within the scope of this review:

- The circumstances surrounding the process for investigating the allegations against ministry personnel and the decisions and actions taken in response to the allegations.
- The practices, policies, procedures and training in place in the public service for responding to complaints about government personnel.

Out of Scope

- The Ministry of Health policies and practices related to research, contracting and data-management at the time of the allegations were made and any changes that have been made to those policies and practices in response to the allegations.
- The circumstances of any privacy breach or inappropriate data access related to the allegations and how they were subsequently resolved.
- Decisions made following the terminations in the context of settlement of grievances and legal claims.

Deliverables

The report will include:

- A review of the decisions and actions taken during the response to the health research allegations.
- Identification and review of relevant human resource management and investigation policies, processes and practices in place in the public service and whether they were adhered to in this case.
- Proposals for short term actions and long term remedial approaches to address any actions, practices or policies identified.

Approach

The review will be conducted by Marcia McNeil, LL.B. To ensure the review is completed with the necessary objectivity and expertise, the head of the BC Public Service Agency selected an individual that is not an employee of government and has a background in investigations in the area of labour and employment law. The final approach to the review will be agreed to by Marcia McNeil and the head of the BC Public Service Agency, but is anticipated to include the following:

- Gathering and reviewing documentary evidence including all relevant materials gathered to date;
- Surveying relevant policies, practices and procedures;
- Conducting interviews of or meetings with involved parties and government officials.

A final report will be submitted to the head of the Public Service Agency no later than Oct. 31, 2014.

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