

Ron Kruzeniski:

It is Privacy Awareness Week. And obviously, as the name suggests, we have a chance to focus on privacy of our personal information and particularly our personal health information. And today I'm really pleased to talk to Andrew Will, who is the CEO of the largest employer in the province, the Saskatchewan Health Authority. Andrew, welcome and thanks for taking the time to talk to me.

Andrew Will:

Thanks, Ron. Pleasure to be part of the podcast.

Ron Kruzeniski:

So, Andrew, in preparing for this, I did a little bit of research and I'm amazed the extensive experience you've had in the health sector in both Alberta and Saskatchewan. I wonder if you just might tell our listeners a bit about your experience and how you got to be CEO of the largest health employer in our province.

Andrew Will:

Well, Ron, I was born and raised in Saskatchewan, so I've lived here most of my life. My family farms near Tisdale. And in the early days when my family was building the farm, both of my parents worked in healthcare. My dad was an orderly and my mom was a special care aide. And it was really hearing their stories about healthcare and the impact that it had and the people that they met that drew me to have an interest in healthcare. And I've just been really fortunate in my career to have opportunities to serve in healthcare industry, both in Alberta and Saskatchewan. Most of my time in Saskatchewan, I was CEO when we had 32 health districts, and then when we had 12 health regions and also had the chance to be a CEO of one of the nine health regions in Alberta.

I was part of the executive team when Alberta Health Services was formed as a Provincial Health Authority. And then it's really great to serve in my own home province as a CEO of the Saskatchewan Health Authority. And I would say the best part of that is just being part of a team that provides care and cares for all the people in Saskatchewan.

Ron Kruzeniski:

Well, when you say your parents were in the health sector, then you've been immersed in healthcare for years. Now, before we get down to what I view as some extremely good news, I wanted our listeners to kind of have a bit of sense of the scope and significance of that news. And it starts with just the size of the SHA as an employer. Now my notes said 46,000 staff, but you may have a more up-to-date number as to how many staff are comprised in the SHA.

Andrew Will:

Yeah, the last count that we had, it's a total of 44,462 employees strong. And we've seen growth in the number of employees in the Saskatchewan Health Authority and we continue to see that grow as the needs in the province grow. We also have 2,761 physicians that are privileged and part of our care team throughout the province as well. And I'll just say our staff serve in communities all through the province. We have a total of 61 different hospitals, 153 long-term care facilities, 139 health centres. And of course we also provide care in community through home care and ambulance services and public health and mental health and addictions. So there's just so many people involved in providing healthcare and I'm

just really thankful for the care that they provide each and every day and really 24 hours a day throughout the province.

Ron Kruzeniski:

And when you mentioned the number of hospitals and nursing care facilities, would they all be covered by this approach in terms of training, wherever any of those facilities are in the province?

Andrew Will:

Absolutely. Privacy training has been important to the Saskatchewan Health Authority since our inception and we've provided training to staff all through the province. What's really exciting about this change is now we're leveraging virtual electronic tools to be able to provide training to staff each year. It's now an annual training opportunity for our teams. The training includes videos, testing questions to make sure that our staff understand the material that we're bringing to them. It tracks the employees that have been trained so that we can ensure that all of our employees get the training. And it also includes the staff members signing on to an SHA pledge of confidentiality because we just know how important it is to protect the privacy of people that we care for and we know how important that information is in order for care teams to provide care to patients, residents, and people throughout the province.

Ron Kruzeniski:

And just still focusing on the scope of what we're beginning to talk about, I think you mentioned, was it 2100 physicians, but there's a lot of other professional groups that would be involved either as employees or providing health services in the province and they would be affected by this approach to training, would they not?

Andrew Will:

They sure would. It takes a lot of people to provide healthcare and lots of different professions, as you said. Registered nurses and physiotherapists and lab x-ray technicians and special care aides and housekeepers. And regardless of the profession, regardless of the role, that privacy training is provided to all of our staff because even those people that are not involved in providing clinical care, they are interacting with patients and families and they may overhear information in the course of providing their service and we want to make sure that they know how important it's to protect that privacy.

Ron Kruzeniski:

Now, you've started to touch on it, and I should have a drum roll here, but I think your plan started to evolve in April but tell me exactly what the SHA has decided to do when it comes to staff training.

Andrew Will:

So, while the drum roll would be pretty cool, really it is to ensure that all of our staff have the training each and every year. That our privacy officers, not only do they provide training for our staff, but they also receive concerns at times from our patients or residents if they feel there's been a concern with management of their privacy. So they follow up on those. We also do auditing of our electronic records to make sure that only those that have a need to know are accessing information that we have in our custody. And really they take the learnings from that work to adapt our training each year and ensure that it is really addressing any issues that we're seeing throughout the course of our service delivery.

Ron Kruzeniski:

As you talk about it, Andrew, it's just kind of a massive undertaking. It sort of overwhelms me. But after the staff take the training, do you have them sign any form of confidentiality statement? People have different names for it, but do they sign something that sort of involves them committing to all the privacy rules that are out there?

Andrew Will:

They do. They sign those confidentiality agreements, we call it SHA Pledge of Confidentiality, at the time of hire when they're first hired to be part of our team. And then part of the annual training is they re-sign that Pledge of Confidentiality through the electronic tool that we provide. We also have sometimes third-party providers that we engage with in the delivery of healthcare, and we do have confidentiality agreements that they also need to sign if they're part of the service that we're providing.

Ron Kruzeniski:

And I was going to touch on that again, the pervasiveness of healthcare and the many services, and you deal with a lot of outside organizations. Are they expected to take the same training or are they more so expected to do their own training in their own organizations?

Andrew Will:

Yeah, I really appreciate that question. We do have certain organizations that provide services directly. So, we may fund those organizations and then they are a separate organization that provides care and long-term care affiliates are an example of that where we sometimes contract a long-term care facility to provide services that we do not directly, or may not directly, provide. And in those cases, they are their own trustee of information in the privacy world, so they have their own accountability to provide training. But we do provide access to them to use our training modules if they do choose to do that.

Ron Kruzeniski:

Okay. So if say a particular affiliate said, we're kind of on the small side, but we want to take the training, it could be set up so that they could get access to the SHA training modules?

Andrew Will:

For sure, we're happy to share that with those other organizations.

Ron Kruzeniski:

And is there any method, I mean having 44,000 people plus others of ensuring that staff take the training, is that kind of built into the whole system?

Andrew Will:

It is. Thinkific is the name of the program that we use. The technology allows us to link that to our personnel files and we are able to track employees that have taken the training, we're able to follow up with employees that have not yet taken the training and also with their managers if required, to ensure that people are following through on annual training.

Ron Kruzeniski:

Wow. I am really impressed. A massive undertaking and it must be a lot of thank yous to staff that have worked on SHA's behalf. And I certainly thank you Andrew for taking the time today to talk about it and I think it was really appropriate that we are talking about it during Privacy Awareness week. So thank you again and let you head back to the 101 things that you probably have to do today.

Andrew Will:

Well, Ron, thank you for the chance to join today and I want to thank you for the important role that your office plays in protecting privacy throughout the province and we appreciate the collaboration with your office as we continuously improve the way that we manage privacy as the Saskatchewan Health Authority.

Ron Kruzeniski:

Thanks again and we'll talk to you later.

Andrew Will:

You bet.