

Report on Patient Privacy Volume 22, Number 11. November 10, 2022 Two More CEs Declare Breaches Related to Meta Pixel; Lawmakers Query Facebook

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Two additional health systems have notified patients that their protected health information (PHI) may have been exposed when tracking tools known as pixels—operating in the background on their websites—collected data and shared it with Facebook. One of the health systems also disclosed a similar pixel-relaying information to Google.

Milwaukee-based Advocate Aurora Health notified every user of its MyChart and LiveWell online platforms—some 3 million patients—that tracking tools may have sent their PHI to Facebook and Google.^[1] Advocate Aurora Health, one of the largest nonprofit health systems in the country, appears to be the second health care organization to report a breach due to Meta Pixel (Meta is the parent company of Facebook) and the first to report a breach due to a similar tracking pixel installed by Google.

Meanwhile, WakeMed Health & Hospitals, based in Raleigh, North Carolina, became the third to report a Facebook-related breach when it notified more than 495,000 individuals that their information was included in a breach involving only Facebook. In a statement, WakeMed said it placed pixels provided by Facebook on its website in March 2018.^[2]

“WakeMed intended that the pixel collect anonymous data that would help WakeMed better connect members of our community with WakeMed’s MyChart patient portal, thereby improving access to their health care, and to help improve the WakeMed website,” the health system said. “Unfortunately, the pixel’s software code may have also transmitted some of the information entered into the MyChart patient portal and appointment scheduling page back to Facebook.”

Information that may have been shared with Facebook included email addresses, phone numbers, other contact information, computer Internet Protocol (IP) addresses, emergency contact information, data provided during online check-ins, such as allergy or medication information, COVID vaccine status, and information about an upcoming appointment, such as appointment type and date, physician selected and menu selections, WakeMed said.

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