



Response to ABC story and update on Practice Recognition System (PRS)

I'm writing to respond to a story published by the ABC today regarding HealthEngine and to give you an update on our PRS.

ABC story

HealthEngine respects the privacy of our users – your patients - and appreciates the trust they place in us.

I would like to reassure you that HealthEngine does not provide any personal information to third parties without the express consent of the affected user or in those circumstances described in our privacy policy.

We do have referral arrangements in place with a range of industry partners including government, not for profit, medical research, private health insurance and other health service providers on a strictly opt-in basis.

These referrals do not occur without the express consent of the user.

Contrary to the ABC report's suggestion, consent to these referrals is not hidden in our policies but obtained through a simple pop-up form during the booking process or provided verbally to a HealthEngine consultant. Consent to these referrals is entirely voluntary and opt-in, and we do not provide any personal information for the purposes of a referral without this consent.

These referral services are provided as a value-add to our users who opt-in to the service, in order to help them access the services they request at relevant stages of their health journey.

Users are able to continue to use our booking services even if they do not provide their express consent to being contacted by a referral partner through the pop-up form.

HealthEngine has no referral arrangements in place with marketing agencies or law firms.

Under previous arrangements, HealthEngine provided referrals to law firms but only with the express consent of the user. Our referral partnerships remain constantly under review to ensure patient feedback is taken on board and patients are getting access to the services they request.

I want to make it clear that HealthEngine is unable to access patient data held by My Health Record or the Australian Digital Health Agency.

PRS

On 9 June 2018 an article was published in the Sydney Morning Herald suggesting that HealthEngine was misleading users by editing negative comments out of patient feedback about medical practices under our PRS.

We take these allegations very seriously. The trust of our users and customers is important to us. We want to be sure that users clearly understand the information they obtain from our site, and that the operation of our PRS complies with all of our regulatory obligations.

That is why we have removed the published feedback component of the PRS from our website pending the outcome of a robust internal and external review process.

While we await the outcome of the reviews, HealthEngine is already working to improve its policies and procedures by undertaking a review of all advertising material relating to the PRS; and a compliance training program for all HealthEngine staff.

We are also seeking to work with relevant regulators to ensure that any new policies and procedures going forward comply with all our regulatory obligations.

About the PRS

As a valued practitioner, I wanted to write to you directly to provide you with more background as to why we operate the PRS.

As you may be aware, the PRS was intended to operate as a positive and aspirational recognition system, where only the practices rated highest by the practice's own patients were featured.

Consistent with this aim, we edited some published user feedback to seek to ensure that it complied with the National Law and Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) Guidelines and with our positive intentions for the PRS.

The Health Practitioner Regulation National Law, as interpreted by the AHPRA Guidelines, prohibits the publication of any feedback containing reference to the identity of a specific health practitioner or patient or referring to the provision of clinical care services to the patient and that may represent a "testimonial".

While many of the edits were minor and required by law, it appears there were occasions when our editing went beyond what was required under our regulatory obligations.

It was never HealthEngine's intent to edit user feedback in a way that was misleading, or for the sentiment of that feedback to be changed.

In relation to published feedback, our process was to email all users to let them know that their feedback may have been edited. Occasionally, users have asked us not to publish their edited feedback and we have happily complied.

All the practice's patient feedback, positive and negative, is provided back to the practice unedited.

Over the last three years, we have received very few complaints about the way we have edited published feedback. Nevertheless, we are seeking to work with relevant regulators and will act decisively on the outcomes of the current reviews to ensure our processes meet best practice standards.

Future updates

I understand that you have an interest in the outcomes of our review process and I will keep you updated as to its progress and outcomes.

In the meantime, I invite you to contact our Customer Success Team on 1300 377 639 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

The team at HealthEngine