



A Classic Voice Phishing Scam Has Been Targeting Physicians Again

New York physicians are now receiving calls from individuals identifying themselves as investigators from the “New York Department of Health” in yet another a retread of a classic identity theft scam that we’ve been alerting physicians to for years.

For years, “voice phishers” have engaged in cold calls while masquerading as law enforcement officers.

This time around, the scammers are threatening medical licenses and pressuring doctors to “act immediately” to avoid suspension. The way to avoid suspension is, of course, to immediately pay the investigator with a credit card or by a retail wire service (like Western Union). The call comes from the 518 area code and looks like an Albany-based government phone number.

To be clear, New York’s Office of Professional Medical Conduct (OPMC), while having broad administrative investigatory powers, will never contact a physician at the investigative stage to demand payment. If OPMC is going to reach out, they will typically do so by letter that will include verifiable contact information.

In the extraordinarily rare circumstance that an OPMC investigator might reach out, your first call should always be to your attorney. Let them call the investigator back. Don’t even “confirm” your identity by offering data like your medical license number, social security number or any similar queries.

These scams come around so often because they bank on creating enough stress and worry that their call will shock someone into “cooperating” by providing personal information or the payment demanded. Identity thieves can use information provided to open credit cards, loans, utilities accounts or even obtain government identification like a driver’s license.

The current scam is using OPMC, but scammers in the past have masqueraded as DEA agents, FBI or other law enforcement and other regulators.

As we've said in the past, this scam should serve as a reminder of two things:

First, identity thieves and cybercriminals operate on volume. While the great majority of physicians targeted will likely see through the scam or immediately contact an attorney for help, scam artists bank on hitting the less than 10% who, for whatever reason, may be overcome by fear and indulge the imposters. Doctors who are aware of pending OPMC investigations are especially vulnerable.

Second, physicians are particularly attractive to identity thieves because a physician's professional data is worth an enormous amount. A physician's identity may be used in an attempt to obtain access to prescription medications, medical services and DME. The additional information that may be stolen from a doctor is worth exponentially more to an identity thief.

Please do not give out personal information to a caller unless that caller can be definitively identified and tied to a truly legitimate purpose. And whenever a physician receives contact from legitimate law enforcement, the best course is to seek immediate counsel.

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