Melbourne hospital reports 200 patients as dead instead of discharged

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One of Melbourne's largest hospital networks has apologised for incorrectly sending out more than 200 notices to general practitioners telling them their patients had died.

In fact, the patients had been discharged from Austin hospital the previous day and were very much alive.

The error was described by the state's peak body representing general practitioners, and the Victorian opposition leader, as unacceptable.

The notifications were sent out by Austin Health on 30 July as part of an automated IT system that tells doctors when one of their patients is discharged from hospital.

"In the process of changing the template which notifies a GP of his or her patient's death, the changes were saved to the standard [discharge] template," an Austin Health spokeswoman said.

"We immediately corrected the error upon its identification.

"We apologised unreservedly to affected clinics who, for the most part, were very understanding about the error."

She said it was an unfortunate human error.

Sheehy did not respond to questions that sought to confirm reports by the Herald Sun that at least one doctor notified a patient's family that they had died.

The error was not connected to resourcing and had not affected patient care in any way, she said.

But Victoria's opposition leader, Labor's Daniel Andrews, said it was a sign of an overstretched health system in

crisis.

"It is unacceptable that an error like that was made," he said.

The president of the Australian Medical Association's Victoria branch, Dr Tony Bartone, said many doctors would have been distressed.

"Many of these GPs have long relationships with these patients and their families," he said.

"It would have been distressing to receive such a fax, especially relating to the unexpected death of children and teenagers.

"It is unacceptable for failings like this to happen. IT issues must not undermine patient care or trust in the Victorian healthcare system."

The incident highlighted that Victoria lacked a strong IT health system, Bartone said.

"Victorians are still being denied this necessary resource."

The incident was the second headache for Austin Health in five months. In April, Fairfax media reported Austin Health's new computerised booking system had caused extremely sick patients to miss crucial specialist appointments.

But Victoria's health minister, David Davis, described claims that the health system was struggling as "ridiculous".

"The Coalition government has increased funding for Austin Health by $98.1m since Daniel Andrews was health minister under the previous Labor government," Davis said.