How safe are you?
Jane Armitage discusses practice security after her first-hand experience

Earlier this year we had a break in at the Practice. Luckily they only took the charity box, however recently they returned. This time it was rather bizarre.

Our security, I would have thought, was good, but not good enough for anyone with determination. They entered the building by taking a metal frame surrounding the metal shutter, this enabled them to take the shutter off and leave in the car park, so that was rather kind as they could have weighed it in.

They next managed to get through a wood and metal door with three five-lever mortise locks fitted, and entered the building to be met by another door encased in metal. That was no problem to them; this led to the Reception area where they managed to dismantle the intruder alarm and leave in pieces. Although we pay for an alert should the alarm activate, two of the partners were abroad and my mobile battery had depleted, so some use that was.

No money was taken but they had destroyed my office including kicking the door in, which brought the architrave down. It was a total mess; paper strewn everywhere, units damaged, some spare keys and paperwork missing. My laptop had been taken, luckily I had backed the computer up and I believe in paper trails so what I hadn’t backed up the paper trail enabled me to re-input.

The computer was encrypted and we follow data security policies; I informed the ICO only to receive an email informing me that a case officer will be in touch shortly. They got in touch after two months. What is the point in having protocols which are compulsory to abide when the first time you need to follow procedure nothing timely happens? Some managers may not even have thought of this as the correct protocol to follow; it’s not something you give daily thought to.

These intruders walked past several laptops and computers and left them, but what they did take was two diplomas: my diploma in Dental Practice Management was taken off the wall plus the Hygienist Diploma taken from her locked personnel file. All personnel files were locked and all had fingerprints on, so I don’t know what they were looking for. I would have thought this could have been an identity theft however the police have said not.

Even the surgeries had been affected; one dental unit requires replacement as it appears they may have tripped over the foot pedal and fallen into the bracket table, making it inoperable. A great hand print was found here, but gloved.

It has left me wondering how far you have to go to make the practice and its contents secure. Although there were not excessive items taken, it appears that the target was aimed primarily at the Manager's office. Taking the laptop could have brought us to a halt if it hadn’t have been backed up and encrypted. This could have destroyed years of practice management work; the laptop was the hub of the business.

You never think that in a space of 20 minutes an intrusive act of theft could destroy what has taken years to build up.

It has also made us look at our method of contact should the alarm sound again.

One disturbing comment was said to me and the statement was “usually when a crime like this has been committed it happens again a few months later, knowing that the items will have been replaced.”

I urge you all to ensure you have a form of back up and to look at your security level. Things like this were never heard of, but it is the times we live in where nothing is safe and despite how secure you think you are it’s never enough.

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Have you looked at security in your practice?

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