

Managing patient information - the answer is simplification

Medical records contain highly-sensitive personal and confidential information, including present, past, social and surgical history. In terms of the Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA) of 2000, patients have the right to request access to these records, creating the need for healthcare organisations to digitally store their records in the form of an electronic health record (EHR).

By [Monty Zarrouk](#) 17 Oct 2016



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The purpose of the EHR is to allow patients to access their own healthcare data and become overseers of their own information. While the intention behind digitising patient medical history is of undeniable benefit to the patient, it becomes challenging for healthcare organisations to manage these medical records given that patient numbers are constantly increasing and electronic data storage demands are getting larger.

This is further complicated by legislative requirements regarding the security of medical data and the need to keep historic data in an accessible format, should the patient request it. It is clear that the healthcare industry needs a comprehensive data management solution that enables hospitals and clinics to manage and protect their records and migrate aging data in a cost-effective manner without compromising accessibility.

Challenges in the healthcare sector

As with all other industries, the healthcare sector is feeling the pressure to manage clinical records more effectively. Drive by the need to reduce costs and accelerate performance, the digitisation of patient records plays a massive role in the transformation of healthcare, but it is not without risk.

Healthcare is a lucrative target for cybercriminals and organisations are not equipped to defend against or recover from cybersecurity threats like ransomware, malicious viral programs that hold data hostage, until a "ransom" is paid.

Furthermore, hospitals have also seen a 30% increase in patient data each year, half of which comprises medical imaging data. As a result, it has become necessary to find a way to keep medical imaging data current on integration with other clinical systems in order to present an accurate record of patient health, without being too resource-intensive in terms of storage capacity.

Further complicating the demand on IT infrastructure within healthcare are the issues of regulatory compliance and the need for integrated patient data in the form of a single patient record across the care continuum.

Traditionally healthcare providers have managed numerous medical data silos using multiple data management systems, instead of implementing a central clearing house for the management, storage and sharing of clinical and business data. While the EHR has become the foundation of coordinated healthcare provision, it can no longer be used as a single source of patient data, as more and more patients get their healthcare needs met by a variety of different care providers.

Healthcare organisations thus need to adopt a common patient data platform that can serve as a gateway or foundation for health information exchange (HIE) between previously-unconnected service providers and patients. This will increase data sharing capabilities between separate EHR systems and increase the interoperability of EHR software to allow providers to access patient information as needed. By sharing information between organisations, it becomes possible for the patient to get access to care faster, with the benefit of greater data coordination.

This is especially important when it comes to managing chronic conditions, and has a positive impact on population health management as well.

Moving forward in digital healthcare

As picture archiving and communications system (PACS) data output continues to grow and as new innovations are being made in PACS capabilities, healthcare providers are struggling to archive this data to meet retention requirements in a manner that enables access for ongoing patient care.

In order to integrate existing PACS data and eliminate the costs of maintaining legacy PACS applications a solution is needed that combines data archiving, migration and management in a manner that is end-to-end. This will retire legacy PACS applications and allow the healthcare organisation to take control of their clinical data, cost effectively and simply.

Furthermore, a unified clinical archive and data management platform eliminates storage vendor lock-in. It should enable companies to leverage data management across multiple hardware and software platforms. This platform enables hospitals and radiology groups to reduce future costs of PACS migration and decommissioning across multiple systems, while at the same time promoting a standardised approach to archiving and interoperability.

This type of integrated solution will keep clinical data available, fully-protected and ensure the accessibility of data - from medical images in archive, through to EHRs. The consolidation of backup, archiving and recovery within a single platform eliminates the need for multiple point products, while providing an efficient, cost-effective approach to broader healthcare data management. In short, the answer lies in unification and simplification of healthcare record management.

By bringing together previously disparate silos of data into a single platform in a manner that benefits both the clinician, the healthcare organisation and the patient at hand, the storage and retention of medical records in the healthcare sector will be enhanced.

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