STORETEC

The foundations of a paperless NHS

DOCUMENT SCANNING:

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Contents

i. Introduction: Towards Jeremy Hunt's paperless NHS

Back in January 2013, Jeremy Hunt announced his ambitions of creating a paperless NHS by 2018. In a speech to the Policy Exchange, he said technology will allow doctors and nurses the time they need to look after the sick.

For Mr Hunt, the clearest example of the need for a digitised NHS is patient records. In his opinion it is time for these documents to be stored on a computer rather than in filing cabinets.

Paper records can only be in one place and seen by one set of eyes at a time. Mr Hunt described a scenario where a doctor prescribed medication incorrectly as the patient's notes were lost and there were no available copies. He added that more often than not, people have to repeat their medical histories to different people because healthcare professionals don't have instant access to these files.

Digitising patient records would solve many of these problems: Scanning archives of paper documents into a computer system would mean an individual's full medical history would be available at the touch if a button.

However, the process must be done correctly in order to keep the data secure and minimise the risk of a breach. Certain controls must be employed to ensure the records are correctly governed and the Data Protection Act must be adhered to at all times.

The transition to digitising patient records may be an overwhelming prospect, but the benefits on an electronic patient records (EPR) system are vast.

It is deeply frustrating to hear stories of elderly dementia patients turning up at A&E with no one able to access their medical history, and for their sakes as well as all NHS users we need to put this right," **Jeremy Hunt, January 2013.**

ii. Building solid foundations

The most important element of any project, no matter the scale, is the foundation. Without a solid bedrock, an EPR system will not be successful.

This is where document scanning comes in. The paper archives detailing an individual's medical history need to be converted into a digital format so a doctor or nurse can access this information quickly and efficiently.

Furthermore, implementing such as system would allow the government to meet the terms of the Mandate issued by Mr Hunt in 2012, which states that the public should be able to view their GP records online.

"The NHS cannot be the last man standing as the rest of the economy embraces the technology revolution. Only with world class information systems will the NHS deliver world class care." **Jeremy Hunt, January 2013.**

http://www.healthcareconferencesuk.co.uk/news/paperless-nhs-jeremy-hunts-full-speech-here

Digitised records can also form the foundations of disaster recovery plans. In the case of flood or fire damage, it is likely paper files would be damaged beyond repair and the information they contain would be lost forever.

Healthcare providers must spend time and money to make sure they have technology in place to be prepared for these disasters. Computer records can be backed-up and restored in the event of a disaster, meaning the important information could be recovered if the physical hardware the data is stored on was damaged.

In a report - entitled 'Safer Hospitals, Safer Wards: Achieving an integrated digital care record' - the NHS says that converting paper records into a digital format will enable a "rapid progression to digital records."

Sir David Nicholson, chief executive of NHS England, believes that building solid foundations will transform the health service.

In the review, he wrote: "Better use of digital technologies will transform clinical effectiveness and outcomes and reduce the administrative burden on frontline staff; it will enable the integration of care around the person who is being treated; it will empower people to do more for themselves."

The task of scanning patient records may seem insurmountable, but third parties can be brought in to tackle the bulk of the work. Back in 2012, Storetec handled the document scanning for the Primary Care Trust, and once the historical records were digitised, the company was able to convert new files on a monthly basis.

iii. Keeping patient data safe

Data security is a growing concern for the public and organisations alike. These fears are exacerbated every time there is a widely reported incident of data loss. Digital records are more secure than paper files, as layers of security can be added to the network.

These levels of protection bolster the NHS's own information governance rules, which cover holding data securely and confidentially, obtaining it fairly and lawfully and recording it accurately.

Digital records meet and exceed these requirements, whereas paper records lag far behind. A locked filing cabinet is still vulnerable as it can be broken into. Access to files stored on a computer system can be set so that only staff that needs to use the data to carry out their daily duties can access it - the same cannot be said for physical files. In addition, document management software can keep a record of who has attempted or successfully gained entry to these files, which means if a data loss happens there is a trail of breadcrumbs to follow.

http://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/safer-hosp-safer-wards.pdf
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Research undertaken by Health Information Privacy (HIPAA) in the US suggests that EPRs have improved public confidence in the safety of their medical records. The survey revealed that 23 per cent of people believed their confidential data was being handled a 'great deal' better since the health service implemented digital records and 44 per cent believed it had somewhat improved.

However, digital records should not encourage complacency and data security must remain a priority for the NHS. Any breaches would be heavily scrutinised by the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) - a body that has the power to pass down financial penalties of up to £500,000.

Monetary sanctions are the not the only consequences of poor management of data, the reputational damage can be irreparable. Patients must be able to trust an organisation that holds confidential and sensitive information.

But, Mr Hunt is confident that the NHS will be able to rise to the challenge, as he told the audience at the Policy Exchange: "If the banks can make people confident that their money is safe, we must surely be able to develop a system that keeps medical records safe too."

iv. Digital records benefit the NHS, their staff and patients

The benefits of converting paper records into a digital format are not limited to patients alone. The NHS and its staff members will also reap the rewards from working in a paperless environment.

Central repositories of data

One issue that is irritating and inconveniencing to people seeking medical assistance and the employees that are trying to provide help is trying to locate the individual's medical history.

By scanning paper records and storing them in a digital document management system, these files are almost instantly available. Employees will be able to search through a central repository of data to find the relevant information.

This means a person doesn't need to wait while an NHS staff member frantically searches for their records.

The consequences of a data breach

Back in March, the British Pregnancy Advice Service was fined £200,000 as a consequence of a serious breach of the Data Protection Act, which saw thousands of people's details to be revealed by a cyber-criminal. The charity was unaware that its website stored confidential information concerning its clients. The information accessed by the hacker included the names, address, date of birth and telephone number of people who requested a call back for advice on pregnancy-related issues. David Smith, the ICO's deputy commissioner and director of data protection, said that "ignorance" was "no excuse" for health organisation's holding personal data.

http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/health-information-privacy-hipaa-notices-have-improved-publics-confidence-that-their-medical-information-is-being-handled-properly-54137872.html

Lost/misplaced documents

Another problem with paper documents is that they can easily go astray, which can cause delays in treatment in an environment like the NHS. According to Doc.it, 7.5 per cent of all paper files are lost or misplaced - a figure that is unacceptable in the health service given the sensitive nature of the information contained in patient files.

Digital records are hard to lose if they are labelled correctly, as a doctor or nurse could simply type the patient's name or other identifier into the system and the relevant records would appear. Some hospitals and health services have already successfully adopted such practices.

For example, King's College Hospital, London, is well on course to achieve Mr Hunt's 2018 paperless target. Writing in The Guardian, Colin Sweeney, director of IT, said that the call for digital records originally came from clinicians, as they wanted quicker access to patient records.

"Electronic notes are available wherever and whenever they are needed, and it is not necessary to pass bundles of papers between clinics because more than one person can view them at one time", he noted.

Around 80 per cent of the hospital's processes are now done electronically, rather than using physical documents. This includes the clipboards at the ends of patient beds, which are now are being phased out as nurses now record their observations on an iPod touch. This information can be backed up, either onto another gadget or to the cloud, meaning if the device is lost the data isn't.

Improved patient experience

Converting paper records into digital files means moving a step closer to Mr Hunt's aspirations of allowing patients to view their GP record by 2015. Giving the public the tools to access their medical history puts the power in their hands.
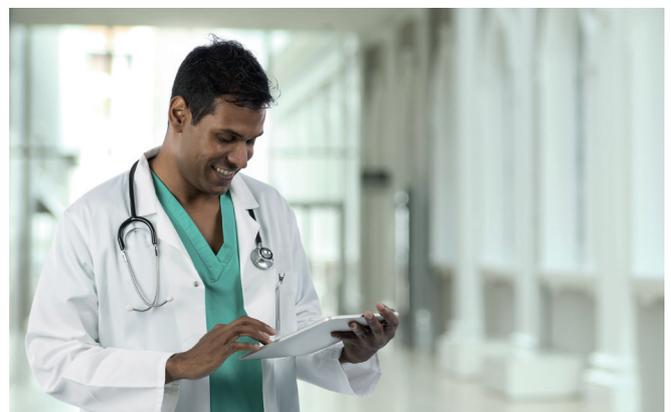
There are some health care providers that have already made this transition. In his speech to the Policy Exchange, Mr Hunt talked about how Maudsley Hospital has created a digital repository of patient data – entitled 'MyHealthLockerLondon' - allowing people to access their records.

He commended them for taking the first steps towards fulfilling the Mandate, adding: "They can also feedback on their care plan, helping them to take control of their own healthcare."

Going digital improves efficiency

Storetec has worked with the NHS on previous projects to improve the efficiency of the record keeping system.

In reference to the project, the information governance manager, NHS CCG, said: "It used to take forever to bring the box back from storage and then root around inside hoping the file was there. Now, we can get the documents onscreen in seconds. The improvements that we have seen in our administrative efficiency have been considerable. Add to this the increased security of working with electronic images and we feel that the overall benefits are huge."

http://www.doc-it.com/articles/benefits-running-paperless.html
http://www.theguardian.com/healthcare-network/2013/jun/07/paperless-kings-college-hospital
http://www.healthcareconferencesuk.co.uk/news/paperless-nhs-jeremy-hunts-full-speech-here

If a patient calls their GP or local hospital for information regarding things like a recent visit or medications they are taking, they want their request to be dealt with in a timely manner. This is often impossible if the staff member has to go away and rifle through filing cabinets or stacks of paper.

Once archives of records have been scanned into the NHS' computer systems, secretaries, doctors, nurses and other employees would have access to the information they need to provide an excellent service to patients.

Reduced costs

The NHS would be able to save money as GP surgeries and hospitals would significantly reduce the amount of money needed for ink, paper and printer or photocopier maintenance.

Neil Robson, managing director of Storetec, believes much needed space would be freed up once cumbersome filing cabinets are removed from workspaces.

He said: "When you realise that a standard four drawer filing cabinet takes up nine square feet of space and that 18 per cent of office space is taken up with paper documents, the benefits of a scanned archive are clear. If you then couple that with the efficiency savings brought by effectively managed electronic records, no organisation can afford not to digitise their documents."
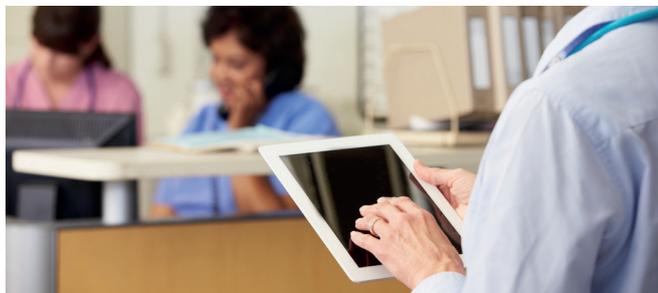
v. Future possibilities

Converting physical records into digital copies is only the first step to embracing a digital working environment. The NHS would be able to implement new schemes that are supported by Mr Hunt's paperless policy.

The UK's health service could develop bring your own device (BYOD) and choose your own device (CYOD) strategies that allow staff to use their own gadgets, or those owned by the NHS, to record information. These policies are on the rise in the private sector and it seems they are here to stay.

Charles Black, chief executive of Nasstar, stated: "There is a growing demand by today's plugged in workforce to use their own devices at work. While some employers have a blanket ban on this, it's clear that most in our survey realise that they look more attractive if they allow it, at least in some form."

BYOD policies have already been deployed in the care sector and have allowed workers to improve the care they give their patients. With mobile gadgets staff are no longer bound to their desks as information can be gathered remotely and sent back to the office. Employees can log their attendance, adding a layer of transparency to the care they give.
According to Computing, one hospital has already embraced BYOD. James Norman, IT director for Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospitals NHS Trust, told the website that such policies are the only way forward for the health service as it faces budget cuts. Mr Norman believes schemes that allow staff to use their own devices for work purposes could save that NHS millions as it wouldn't need to replace as much of its own equipment.

"Every NHS organisation, including all 266 NHS trusts, has a major incentive to do this because the savings are so enormous – £4.4 billion annually according to today's PWC report – that money, released to spend on better care, can go a long way towards helping them deliver health services sustainably in a time of real financial pressure," **Jeremy Hunt, January 2013.**

http://www.nasstar.com/news/byod-survey

vi. Conclusion: Digital records are the hallmark of a modern NHS

Is Mr Hunt's paperless dream achievable? TechUK believes it is. In their report - entitled 'Digitising the NHS by 2018 - One Year On' - the authors noted: "Progress is well underway - the first year has seen significant activity in terms of planning; allocating funding, assessing capabilities of IT solutions, and raising awareness and educating audiences on the digital health agenda."

Researchers also commented on the "refreshing change" in infrastructure of the NHS, meaning that progress is being made in the culture so that those opposed to a paperless working environment can better understand the need for such policies.

While some organisations within the health service are well on their way to being digital by 2018, others are lagging behind. The transition can seem daunting, but the journey to being paperless doesn't have to be done alone. Companies, such as Storetec, can make the change to digital painless.

David Wilkinson, sales director at Storetec, said: "Digital records are essential to providing better care and creating a more streamlined and efficient NHS. A managed scanning process ensures that records are never unavailable to those who need them urgently to administer patient care.

"The crux is a close working relationship between the health organisation and scanning provider and clearly defined goals and project milestones. An able provider can actually improve the existing processes of retrieving paper records even whilst the records archive scanning project is in progress."

Scanning physical patient records and converting them into a digital format will mean the NHS has a solid foundation to build on in order to create a completely paperless working environment.

"Safe, digital record keeping is the hallmark of a modern, sustainable and patient-led healthcare service," **Sir David Nicholson, 'Safer Hospitals, Safer Wards: Achieving an integrated care record'**