

OPENTEXT

OCTOBER 2013 | PART 3

Keeping Data in Motion: Demanding HIPAA Regulations Require Top-Notch Software Solutions

Part 3:

Demanding HIPAA Regulations Require Top-Notch Software Solutions

Keeping patient data moving through the healthcare system while maintaining its privacy and security is no easy task. Just ask the many hospitals and medical practices that have paid substantial penalties for missing the mark.

As discussed in Part Two of this series, several covered entities have paid hefty fines and suffered embarrassing media attention for losing laptops, mishandling fax transmissions and a host of other missteps. However, while some providers have been stung, many more have managed to get it right – with the help of the right administrative and IT teams and the right software solutions.

Resolving Florida Heart and Vascular Associates' log jam

Like many group practices, Florida Heart and Vascular Associates (FHVA) in Tampa uses both electronic and paper records to document patient care, according to Chris Patterson, the group's IT administrator. FHVA has nine providers, 75 office visits a day and 50 employees, each with their own workstation. Every patient they see is referred from their primary care physician (PCP), which translates into mountains of records that need to be transferred to and from the practice. Those records are normally faxed to them, as are many hospital records. Adding a variety of lab reports to the mix translates into about 50 pages of faxes per patient per day.

FHVA turned to OpenText to solve the faxing problems the practice was facing. Initially, they had five standalone fax machines in different locations, none of which could talk to one other. As the volume of faxes grew, the practice had to add a sixth machine to handle the overflow. "That was really our breaking point," says Patterson.

"Research revealed that the average cost of a privacy lawsuit was about \$75,000 per patient to settle a single case before trial."

– Chris Patterson, FHVA

These machines required an authorized staffer to physically wait at the correct unit for transmissions. On average, employees were wasting about two and a half hours a day looking for faxes, leafing through faxes and waiting for faxes. And when a machine broke down, the practice was basically out of touch with the doctors at the other end who were wedded to that specific fax number. That loss of communication can do serious damage to a specialty practice that relies heavily on referrals from PCPs. "If people are not satisfied with the way they communicate with us or the service we are giving their patients, they just won't refer their patients to us," says Patterson.

During a recent webinar, “A Simple and Compliant Solution to The Paper Problem in Healthcare,”¹ Patterson also mentioned the practice’s concern about violating HIPAA regulations if a staffer accidentally sent a fax to the wrong person. A one-digit mistake when typing a phone number has the potential to turn into a substantial fine.

FHVA is now using OpenText RightFax, which provides a single entry and exit point for all records communication. It offered several options to send faxes: through a web client, multi-function printers or their e-mail client. The practice can now accommodate about 45 fax numbers for individual practitioners that they work with; all those numbers go directly into one fax server and get routed from there. The system even allows FHVA physicians to access their faxes from home and on their smartphones.

Patterson explained that their main objective in installing a fax server platform was protection: “We wanted to know who was faxing and where they were faxing to.” And for good reason: Their research revealed that the average cost of a privacy lawsuit was about \$75,000 per patient to settle a single case before trial.

Another benefit of the OpenText RightFax system, says Patterson, is the ability to archive all the fax transmissions that have moved into and out of the practice for seven years, which is required by HIPAA rules.

Productivity has also improved, says Patterson, because the practice was able to program the system to send large numbers of faxes – some consisting of 150 pages – to referring physicians at 2AM, for example, when the recipient’s machine would probably not be busy. FHVA has also saved two and a half hours a day in staff time that had been wasted waiting for and tracking down paper faxes. Incoming transmissions now go directly into the email client.

Finally, the practice saw financial gains on several fronts: Patterson estimates that they saved about \$80,000/year in employee time and saved on the paper, toner and maintenance contracts for standalone fax machines.

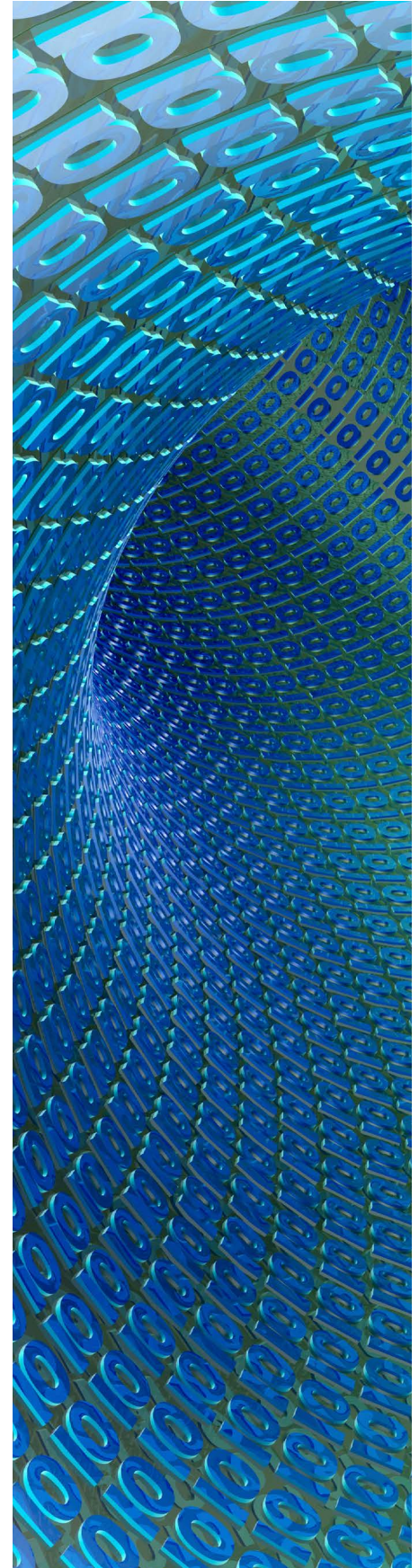
Fax server flexibility

RightFax can work in an analog, digital or IP-based telephony environment, using Fax over IP technology (FoIP). It can also eliminate the need for multi-function printer (MFP) fax kits and legacy fax machines for facilities that prefer not to use them. If, on the other hand, MFPs are an integral part of your workflow, OpenText has integration software that works with several MFP brands, including HP and Ricoh, to make it easier to connect these units to the RightFax system. When using the integration software, there’s a RightFax button on the MFP itself.

“It’s nice to sleep at night instead of being called on paper jams.”

– Keith Anetsberger
IT system administrator

Equally important are the integrations that allow the fax servers to work seamlessly with EMR and health information systems from several vendors, including Epic, NextGen, McKesson, Nuance, MedPlus, GE Healthcare and Healthland.



Although OpenText RightFax has worked well in clinical settings like FHVA, it can fax enable virtually any healthcare platform or system to securely send, receive and archive patient information. That includes back-end systems like billing, claims, and scheduling, pharmacy services, nursing stations and radiology suites. A 2010 Frost and Sullivan report summed up the situation succinctly: “The value proposition of enterprise fax services, particularly fax servers and FoIP, is clearly identifiable, demonstrated, and proven.”²

The University of Kansas Hospital experience

The University of Kansas Hospital (UKH) can certainly attest to the proven value of fax servers. “It’s nice to sleep at night instead of being called on paper jams. RightFax just works,” says Keith Anetsberger, MidAmerica Cardiology Associates, IT systems administrator. Like many U.S. hospitals, UKH was juggling dozens of fax machines, MFPs and the weekly transfer of thousands of medical files. Often, documents that needed to be faxed originated in Epic, but the faxing methods the hospital had in place lacked EMR integration, which meant all files had to be printed and then faxed, which once again required babysitting fax machines to meet HIPAA regulations on keeping protected health information private and secure.

“Seeing RightFax work well within the organization led our hospital’s project team to continue with RightFax and expand the solution throughout the enterprise.”

– Keith Anetsberger

Since the RightFax system was already in use at a UKH subsidiary, MidAmerica Cardiology Associates, the hospital was familiar with its functionality. “Seeing RightFax work well within the organization led our hospital’s project team to continue with RightFax and expand the solution throughout the enterprise,” says Keith Anetsberger.

The system has consolidated previously separate and unreliable faxing methods into a single, enterprise-wide solution, providing UKH with a multi-site, multi-server RightFax Shared Services environment that employs VMware Virtual Services and T.38 FoIP through Avaya Communication Manager.

“RightFax really eases the process and helps us ensure the latest transcribed report is on [the physician’s] desk in a timely fashion.”

– Keith Anetsberger

The most significant benefit has been enhanced patient care. In practical terms, those benefits fall into three categories:

- **Referrals.** With the help of a reliable fax server, acknowledgement of referrals from physicians are handled in a timely manner, with an automated faxing feature that sends a thank you letter from within Epic to the referring physician shortly after a patient is admitted to the hospital.
- **Medical transcription.** “RightFax really eases the process and helps us ensure the latest transcribed report is on [the physician’s] desk in a timely fashion,” says Anetsberger.

FHVA estimates it saved two and a half hours a day in staff time and \$80,000/year in employee time and saved on equipment and maintenance contracts for standalone fax machines.

- **Prescriptions.** In the past, backlogs sometimes prevented patients from receiving their medication for a full day. With the new system in place, prescriptions for non-narcotics can be faxed electronically to a pharmacy. “If a medication is prescribed upon discharge, we immediately generate and deliver the fax. A patient can pick up needed medications on the way home.” says Anetsberger.

Fax remains a key method of keeping data in motion in healthcare

In Part one of this series, we outlined how HIPAA regulations impact the transfer of protected health data and how those rules apply to fax transmission. Part two explained the high cost of non-compliance, which has resulting in million dollar penalties and affected both small and large organizations.

Part three has emphasized the need for a flexible, cost-effective solution to these challenges. For many providers, that solution comes from OpenText. Whether it is RightFax, an on-premises fax server; or EasyLink, a cloud fax service, OpenText customers have eliminated wasted time standing at fax machines and increased both the convenience and security of moving protected health information through the healthcare system.

REFERENCES

- ¹ <https://event.on24.com/eventRegistration/EventLobbyServlet?target=registration.jsp&eventid=445081&session-id=1&key=52F179157F8B5F7058BA475773615E8A&partnerref=tmclanding&sourcepage=register>
- ² <http://www.frost.com/sublib/display-report.do?searchQuery=enterprise+fax&ctxixpLink=FcmCtx1&ctxixpLabel=FcmCtx-2&id=9849-00-16-00-00&bdata=aHR0cDovL3d3dy5mcm9zdC5jb20vc3JjaC9jYXRhbG9nLXNlYXJjaC5kbz9wYWdlU2l6ZT0xMiZzb-3J0Qnk9UiZxdWVyeVRleHQ9ZW50ZXJwcmVzZStmYXgmeD0xNyZ5PTEzQH5AU2VhcmNolFJlc3VsdHNAfkAxMzgwNzM1MjI5MTEz>
(There is a fee for this Frost and Sullivan report.)

About OpenText

OpenText is the leader in Enterprise Information Management (EIM). EIM enables organizations to grow the business, lower costs of operations, and reduce information governance and security related risks. OpenText focuses on the key drivers of business success to improve business insight, strengthen business impact, accelerate process velocity, address information governance and provide security.

OpenText Information Exchange solutions help organizations integrate and extend their information exchange systems and processes in order to improve their efficiency, decrease security risk, and lower their transaction cost for internal and external information exchange. For more information visit: faxsolutions.opentext.com.

