

eCopy Provides a Cure For HIPAA-Compliance Ills

Like all healthcare organizations, Health Plus - New York City deals with massive amounts of paper-based documentation. Patient medical histories, enrollment forms, and claim forms, are constantly being sent, received, archived, and retrieved.

Health Plus had always had stringent procedures in place to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of all patient medical information. However, it recently found that even these procedures were not enough under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), passed in 1996 by the U.S. Congress. Like many other companies involved in or associated with the healthcare field, Health Plus was facing penalties if it did not find a way to become HIPAA-compliant by 2003. This looming deadline, plus a desire to enhance the overall document management process set off an intensive search for solutions that could address both of these areas.

"We were not happy with the proliferation of fax machines throughout our 12-facility network," said Farley Kamhi, CIO for Health Plus. "In addition, we were looking for a scanning solution that could help us improve our workflow by streamlining document flow in every area of our operations - from Provider Relations to Enrollment to Marketing. But the biggest driver, without a doubt, was the need to achieve HIPAA compliance ... and fast."

HIPAA's ticking clock

The main thrust of HIPAA is to guarantee health insurance portability when workers switch jobs. However, the Act also includes sweeping provisions to ensure the privacy and security of patient health information, especially in the electronic age.

The privacy rules obligate an organization subject to HIPAA to implement appropriate administrative, technical, and physical safeguards to protect the privacy of patient health information, whether in electronic

form or not. At the same time, the organization must make sure that the information is readily available to those with a legitimate need to see it. The security rules deal with administrative procedures, physical safeguards, technical security services, and technical security mechanisms. Healthcare organizations now have either 24 months or 36 months to comply, depending on their size.

Compliance made easy with eCopy

Health Plus began its search with a call to a number of copier vendors. After a visit from their local Canon dealer, they realized that they didn't have to look any further.

"We already had a number of Canon copiers in our facilities and asked the dealer about the availability of scanning capabilities," said Kamhi. "As the conversation progressed, we also mentioned our concerns about faxes and the entire HIPAA compliance issue. Our rep showed us that we could address all three of our requirements with Canon and the eCopy scanning solution. Needless to say, we were thrilled."

Comprehensive security built in

In addition to providing a feature-rich, easy to use way of transforming paper documents into electronic files and then streamlining the entire document flow, the eCopy ScanStation provides impressive security capabilities in six key areas:

- Device security to prevent unauthorized access to the eCopy ScanStation
- Restricted access to the network from the eCopy ScanStation
- Password authentication for major scanning functions
- Inbox security to prevent unauthorized access to scanned image files
- 128-bit document encryption to ensure the privacy of sensitive information sent over the Internet
- Activity logging to record customizable data fields

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These all make major contributions to achieving HIPAA compliance.

eCopy's integration with fax services also contributes to HIPAA compliance in a number of ways. First, since a fax service delivers faxes to individual e-mail accounts, there is no danger of confidential faxes being seen or read by mistake, as can often happen when traditional fax machines are located in public areas or serve multiple users.

The eCopy Desktop software bundled with the eCopy scanning solution provides additional security features, such as the ability to whiteout specific information on faxes and e-mails sent to selected destinations, while leaving the information intact on the electronic original.

eCopy – Just what the doctor ordered

Health Plus purchased 12 eCopy-equipped Canon imageRUNNER copiers and deployed over 100 Internet fax numbers throughout the organization. "The multiple fax numbers are perfect for achieving HIPAA compliance," said Kamhi. "They allow us to give key employees in highly confidential areas, such as Medical management, their own private fax numbers. When a fax comes in, the fax service directs it right to the employee's desktop, eliminating any possibility that it might be seen by others." And since additional numbers are reasonably priced, Health Plus can always expand the number pool as needed.

As for simplifying and streamlining the workflow, the eCopy solution has already allowed Health Plus to start eliminating individual fax machines and greatly improve the way all documentation is stored, distributed, and retrieved.

"With the almost unchecked proliferation of paper documents in every area of the healthcare industry, it's been hard to achieve the levels of efficiency and security that either we ourselves have established or that have been set by external regulatory agencies," said Kamhi. "The Canon/eCopy solutions are changing all that. As a result, we can spend more time on providing outstanding health-related services, rather than on management and compliance issues."

A profile of Health Plus – New York City

Health Plus, one of the fastest growing managed care organizations in New York City, was established in 1984 with a commitment to providing coordinated quality health care and improving access for a diverse and growing number of uninsured and underserved families.

This non-profit organization offers better access to coordinated quality care through affiliations with over 2,000 primary care providers and 260 health centers in Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens, the Bronx, and Staten Island. The Health Plus provider network consists of 50 hospitals, their outpatient clinics, and over 5,000 specialists and other providers in the New York City area.

The goal of Health Plus is to build healthy communities through its three programs: Child Health Plus - New York State's Health Plan for children; Family Health Plus- a New York State program that provides qualified adults with free health care; and Health Care Plus - a medical plan for people covered by Medicaid.

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