

A Prescription For Document Management

By George Zimmerman, Internet Administrator, St. Peter's Health Care Services

The health care industry spends almost twice as much time with documents than other industries, according to a study by research firm IDC. Half of that time is spent looking for information, and 33 percent of searches are unsuccessful.

St. Peter's Health Care Services was just one of the many organizations that struggled to distribute and share the information that is critical to hospital management. Like many hospital systems, we were reliant on hard copy documents. In just one of our many locations across New York's Capital Region, these documents include a variety of medical forms, manuals, brochures, training materials and policy guidelines for compliance with Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) and HIPAA (privacy law) standards.

We needed a better system to manage our policies and procedures electronically. Fortunately, it didn't take long to find Xerox DocuShare®, a Web-based enterprise content management system used for exchanging, managing and publishing information.

Clearing the Document Clutter

We began by rolling out the software to the nursing department to help manage the more than 2,000 documented patient care standards and procedures, such as guidelines for Cardiac Services, Critical Care, Emergency Departments (ED), Generic Standards, Perinatal Standards, and Surgical Services, all of which are constantly updated and require strict adherence. Just a short while ago, these documents were stored in shelves of binders at each of the 16 nursing units throughout St. Peter's Hospital. Updated forms looked similar but contained different details, leaving staff unknowingly working from outdated documents. With no system to keep forms updated across all of the units, we had a major versioning problem and were recommended by JCAHO authorities to improve efficiency in the policy update area.

As if that wasn't challenging enough, our staff was spending time on the storage, replication and distribution of hard copy documents – time that could be better used serving patients.

With DocuShare, we've eliminated many of the paper-intensive processes previously used to distribute information by posting digital files to the "SPHIntranet DocuShare" site. The digital documents are marked by the date they were posted and new files are highlighted. Now, all users can recognize and have easy access to the most current versions of our policies and procedures, and creating, editing and publishing these documents can be done in a mere three weeks as opposed to three months. We've also saved critical physical space at our nursing stations by discarding countless shelves of binders, and this contributed to passing our last JCAHO survey with flying colors.

To ensure our staff has continual access to the critical documents captured in DocuShare, our Emergency Preparedness Command (EPC) Center IT response cart – a portable server - maintains a replicate of the DocuShare repository and is kept running by its own power source. All emergency documentation is daily synchronized to this server so that in case of a power outage, bio-terrorism act or other disaster, the administration at St. Peter's can continue to act as a resource to the hospital and all centers across its health care network.

HIPAA Compliance Example

In our Women and Children's Center, software has been critical in complying with HIPAA regulations. A custom DocuShare application allows physicians to securely transmit patient referral forms via a fax server to a "watched" password protected folder within DocuShare. Only authorized nurses and other employees have access and permission to these folders, satisfying requirements for patient privacy.

Unclogging the Network

The Corporate Communications department also began to use the software to publish its internal newsletter, *InfoNet*. Instead of e-mailing its graphic intensive, often 100-megabyte) file to each

member of the staff, the department now posts the document to DocuShare and distributes a link to the file. This significantly reduces the amount of server space required for each user's e-mail account and has eliminated the frequent incidents of the server exceeding its storage capacity. The department also benefits from a centralized space to store past versions of the newsletter for easy access.

Employee Access

The content management software has proven simple to use, yet effective, and important files can now be accessed from this central repository. In each location and department, two DocuShare Super Users – approximately 200 people – create document containers and serve as the gateway to publishing information to the site, which can be accessed by most of the 4,500 employees. With our newest upgrade of DocuShare, all members of the staff have one-click access to the important documents they need every day and can customize their DocuShare homepage to display the collections they use most frequently.

Our organization's Education department ensures that each member of the staff is trained on the basic functionality of DocuShare after being hired, due to the clinical importance of being able to access policies. The hospital also has a computer-based training program for DocuShare, as well as for many other clinical programs, that employees can access at any time. The software is easy to learn for employees who already have familiarity with a basic Web browser, and this ease of use has been a major factor in its success.

By implementing DocuShare, St. Peter's Health Care Services has cut costs and increased employee productivity. We have improved our efficiency in searching for hardcopy manuals and have eliminated the extra costs associated with distributing printed materials to multiple locations. Most importantly, we're able to devote more time and energy to our patient care.

For more information on DocuShare, visit www.docushare.com or call 1-800-735-7749