

Medical Records.

Treat them as you would treat your patients.

Written by Mrs. Rena Georgiou, Document Solutions Consultant at Fileminders Ltd



Information found in medical records is highly sensitive and vital for each patient. Properly protecting them, means complying with the various regulations of every country that apply to patient records and each professional has to be really cautious about these principles.

Patients' records also contain all the necessary information to treat patients properly whenever this is needed (for a routine or an urgent appointment). Making sure they are kept safe and under the proper preconditions, is the key to successful operation of anyone's practice. However, this can be an unbearable proposition. If this is not done right and regulations and standards are not followed, this can be an expensive one.

In order to prevent any information leakage and smoothing the road to an efficient medical records policy, the five steps shown below can be followed.

Step one: Perform a needs assessment

A Documents Solutions Consultant can detect any risk exposure that your records might be in, in terms of location and the format of those. The Consultant will make recommendations to decrease the risk and increase the efficiencies. Many decision makers proceed in investing to new hardware or software before applying first a needs assessment survey. This is the reason why many of them loose the control and actually not having the return on investment and operation expected. Invest in a needs assessment before doing anything.

Step two: Examine your storage

Paper records are sensitive, so make sure to protect them following some basic steps:

- Invest in fire alarm system
- Invest in a proper video surveillance system
- keep these in temperatures between 18-21 C and 55% relative humidity
- keep these in a format and location that will be accessible and easy to find whenever this is needed

Before proceeding in any of the above, you should see your benefit if outsourcing the service, which will safe your capital in investing in something more relative to your field.

Step three: Develop a retention schedule

You need to prevent improper or prematurely disposal of vital records. Formulating a strategy to manage the life cycle of patient records can at best be difficult and frequently not easily managed internally. A retention schedule kept in line with the records management practices and relevant regulations and legislation will help. The disposal of those should also be audited by the proper way of secure shredding in order to avoid any misleading's.

Step four: Scanning/ Electronic archiving of files

A wise and really efficient way to keep your records safe and confidential is using a comprehensive document management system. This will enable you centrally managing your documents and their associated business processes. In such a way you will be able to access your patients' records through a web interface, over a secure connection, in real time and no capital outlay. Professional companies can provide you this full pack of a document management system and also the scanning of your documents in a reliable and failsafe way.

Step five: Develop an emergency plan

Especially in large organizations, a Risk Manager should be appointed and being in charge for protecting the medical records storage site and also develop an emergency plan. This must include an annual exercise involving management and staff. Lessons learned will help, being proactive and updating your action plan. Therefore, in order to avoid any misleading's and having a better quality management of your time you are advised to following the steps mentioned above.

