The Future of Fax in Healthcare Is Paperless

Survey Explores Why Paperless Fax Technology Is Gaining Momentum

CONFIDENTIALITY IS A CORNERSTONE OF THE HEALTHCARE INDUSTRY. Inspired by ethical tradition, HIPAA guidelines mandate that patient information be stored and communicated securely. That critical requirement has far-reaching technology implications. Tools such as email, widely used in most industries, lack essential compliance and security and must be shelved in favor of other forms of communication, such as secure fax communications. Although paper-based fax continues to be in use, many organizations are waking up to the advantages of paperless faxing, a digital technology that promises to play an important role now and in the future.

According to a recent QuickPulse survey by IDG Research, faxing is the most common method of communicating patient information, with 50% of all medical communications done via some form of fax: 44% is paper-based, and 56% is handled by paperless, electronic fax technology.

Fax is at a crossroads

Among the many disadvantages of paper-based fax are clinical inefficiencies, labor-intensive processes, limited access to patient information at the point of care, and slow care coordination between providers—all of which erode efficiency, increase costs, and put patient care in jeopardy. Even though these drawbacks are widely recognized, nearly half of patient information is still transmitted by paper-based fax. According to the QuickPulse survey, over two-thirds of the respondents think paper-based faxing should be phased out. However, only 4% said that all faxing should be eliminated. Since faxing is so prevalent in healthcare and paper-based faxing should be eliminated, that leaves a significant role to be played by paperless fax, which executes the secure exchange of patient information with fax protocols, but digitally and without the unwieldiness of paper.

PAPERLESS FAXING SURPASSES PAPER-BASED IN TERMS OF MEDICAL COMMUNICATIONS VOLUME

44%
Paper-based faxing

56%
Paperless, electronic faxing

50% of all medical communications are done via some form of fax

Source: IDG Research 2019

Paperless fax is getting good reviews. According to the survey, the majority of the respondents are happy with their paperless fax solution. In addition to eliminating paper, using paperless fax technology is the first step toward digital exchange of personal health information (PHI) based on emerging standards. And because digital fax integrates with electronic medical record (EMR) systems, document management systems, and desktop applications, it eliminates the inefficiencies of paper-based fax, shortens the time it takes to get patient information to the right provider or system, and provides faster access to critical information at the point of care.

A significant majority of the survey respondents value the integration capabilities of digital fax. Among the respondents, 76% either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they are happy with their current paperless faxing methods because it's integrated with their EMR, back-end system, or other applications.
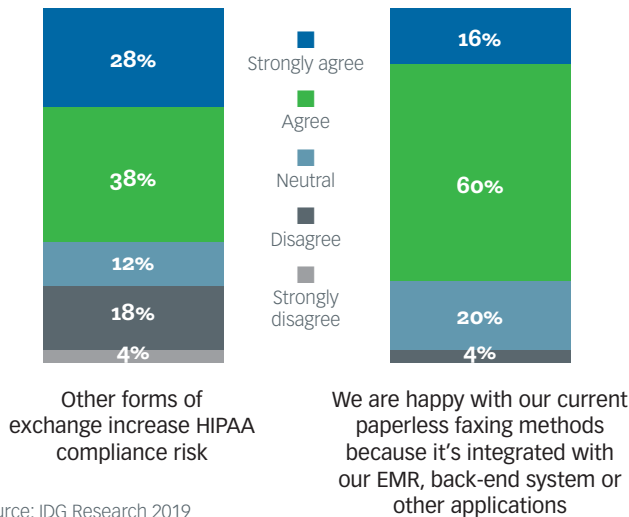
THREE-QUARTERS OF HEALTHCARE ORGANIZATIONS SAY THEY ARE HAPPY WITH THEIR CURRENT PAPERLESS FAXING

Strongly agree
Agree
Neutral
Disagree
Strongly disagree

Other forms of exchange increase HIPAA compliance risk

28% / 38% / 12% / 18% / 4%

We are happy with our current paperless faxing methods because it's integrated with our EMR, back-end system or other applications

16% / 60% / 20% / 4%

Source: IDG Research 2019

By integrating digital faxing with EMR, document management systems, and clinical applications, a paperless fax solution becomes the most connected device in an organization, optimizing patient information exchange, reducing costs, and increasing productivity.

Another key benefit: Digital fax reduces risk to help ensure compliance with HIPAA guidelines, protecting the confidentiality of PHI. Survey respondents recognize this: Most agreed or strongly agreed that other forms of exchange increase HIPAA compliance risk (see chart above).

Fax for the future

Given its integration capabilities, a paperless fax solution can provide a path to emerging forms of secure patient information exchange. Instead of eliminating fax altogether, health organizations can embrace paperless faxing as the catalyst of future patient information exchange.

To meet the need for secure communication of PHI, new, interoperable tools based on standards for the secure transmission of healthcare records are coming into use across many healthcare organizations. The survey found that health organizations are either currently using or considering the use of these tools, such as Direct messaging, FHIR and Smart platforms. Health systems can make a seamless transition to modern, secure, and interoperable exchanges of patient documentation that are integrated across systems and applications, leveraging their existing paperless fax solution.

Meaningful connectivity and interoperability are within the reach of those who simply leverage the most integrated and connected means for patient information exchange—a paperless fax solution—to optimize the exchange to achieve connectivity, improve processes and workflows, and increase care coordination.

Bottom line

In the medical industry, the pressure to reduce costs while increasing the quality of care is relentless. Efficient and secure communication of PHI and medical records is an important requirement for healthcare institutions as they strive to attain these difficult goals.

As new standards of patient information exchange, such as Direct messaging, come into widespread use, it's important that fax technology evolve to coexist with these emerging exchange methods, because fax is so deeply rooted in healthcare. When fax coexists with these forms of exchange, it enables healthcare organizations to begin to transition to new information exchange standards at their own pace.

The QuickPulse survey clearly indicates that paperless fax has a key part to play in the secure, HIPAA-compliant communication of PHI, both now and in the future. By integrating with EMR and other applications, digital fax fulfills a pivotal role today while enabling organizations to seamlessly transition to secure standard protocols tomorrow. For these reasons, IT leaders should strongly consider increasing their investment in cloud-based or on-premises digital fax technology as a secure and efficient means of current communications and a catalyst for future patient information exchange methods.

OpenText™ digital fax in healthcare

OpenText provides secure, compliant and integrated paperless faxing across the entire health organization to eliminate the inefficiencies of fax, optimize patient information exchange, and improve patient care.

OpenText™ Fax2Mail™ is a cloud-based online fax service designed with the security, HIPAA compliance and reliability needed in healthcare. Fax2Mail includes EMR application integrations and additional HIPAA control settings for the privacy and protection of patient data.

OpenText™ RightFax™ is a centralized fax server that provides paperless, secure faxing available on-premises, in a hybrid environment or as a fully managed service. Unlike other fax software solutions, RightFax provides the deepest and broadest integrations with EMR and back-end systems for the secure and compliant exchange of PHI across the entire care team.

Visit us to learn more about **OpenText digital fax solutions.**