

# Managing Multimedia Medical Records: a Health Information Manager's Role

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## Background

Health information has been undergoing major change during the past several years. The entire concept of what health information is has been redefined. Accordingly, health information managers need to take on diverse roles that support new information management tasks. Managing the use or creation of a multimedia medical record is a natural progression for health information professionals. Some of the issues that surround the creation of today's medical records are:

- What is health information management?
- How do I incorporate multimedia data?
- How do I make the transition?

## Health Information Management

Medical record management expanded into health information management in conjunction with the advancement of new technologies. Medical records are no longer just made up of discharge summaries, progress notes, physician's orders, and flow sheets. Online reports from the laboratory and pharmacy, x rays, photographs, videotapes, films, and audio recordings are all part of the clinical data gathered about patients. Information that is generated about patients in healthcare facilities -- regardless of the medium--should all be classified as part of the medical record.

Not only is health information management collecting the patient data at a facility, it is protecting it, interpreting it, and analyzing it to make decisions. So incorporating different pieces of data to create a medical record is today's new challenge. Uses of medical records or health information vary from basic patient healthcare to facility accreditation, from quality improvement trending to medical research and education. These -- and all potential uses of health information -- require that the most current and complete information is available. The fact that health data is now created in multiple forms of media is what makes the health information professional's job challenging.

## Multimedia Data Formats

The paper record is still the most common form of medical record. However, today's "paper" record can be dissected to find other media formats within the paper world. Many facilities already have electronic laboratory and pharmacy systems that allow online viewing of patient information. And paper record environments demand that printouts of patient data be placed in the patient medical record. Besides paper, another medium typically found in a paper record is the monitoring strip. These strips generally are filed in the chart, affixed to paper or in folder pockets. Sample portions of monitoring strips also may be mounted to the medical record, with the entire strip stored separately. Photographs may also find their way into a medical record. However, there are other data forms that need to be addressed in order to create the most complete and thorough medical record.

Videotapes, audio recordings, x rays, and other media output forms should be considered part of a patient's medical record. Yet this creates obstacles in a paper environment since these types of media generally cannot be filed in a standard paper medical record. Health information managers need to look at this challenge and find the ways and means to bring all patient health information together -- creating a complete and complex patient health record. Following are some steps to take in the quest to bring all patient health information together, regardless of media output:

- Look at the current composition of medical records in your facility
- Decide if all patient health information is being collected and managed uniformly
- Evaluate what patient data, if any, is not incorporated in a medical record
- Determine how information that is generally not filed in medical records is obtained and released when it is needed. Do these procedures ensure confidentiality?
- Determine storage requirements for information currently not filed in the medical records
- Meet with staff involved in the management of the health information data that is not filed with the medical record
- Offer to coordinate efforts to bring all pieces of health information together to create one complete multimedia medical record

## **Incorporating Multimedia Data Formats**

Incorporating different forms of multimedia data can be done in various ways. A computer-based patient record at a facility can serve as or can actually create a multimedia medical record. When computerized medical records are implemented at a facility, different media formats can be captured together. By evaluating what patient data a facility generates and matching that with a vendor's electronic medical record product, a multimedia medical record can be created. When all media formats are stored together with other patient data under a unique patient identification, a comprehensive medical record is achieved.

Since most facilities do not have electronic medical record capabilities currently, health information professionals need to be resourceful when incorporating multimedia data formats with basic patient data. Microfilm and microfiche records are examples of medical record formats that most health information professionals are familiar with. However, videotapes, audio recordings, films, photographs, and x rays may not be considered typical formats for medical records. It is the responsibility of the health information professional to inform and educate other departments on the importance of these valuable pieces of data in health information management.

## **Making the Transition**

Aside from implementing a complete electronic medical record for your facility, creating a multidisciplinary team to address the issues related to multimedia medical records is essential. The health information professional should organize the team and act as a visionary. One of the team's main goals should be to develop an incorporation plan. The plan should list the patient data that needs to be incorporated to create a complete medical record. The plan should also identify policies and procedures on creating and managing a multimedia medical record. This team also can aid in the identification of issues and the creation of solutions surrounding multimedia medical records as they arise.

Acceptance and space may be two issues that health information professionals encounter. Different departments may not agree that their film or x rays, for example, should be considered part of the medical record. Meeting with department staff and discussing the benefits of incorporating their patient data may persuade them to change their minds. Working this topic out with the multidisciplinary team will help open doors to the acceptance of combining multimedia formats for a complete medical record.

The issue of space becomes a problem when different multimedia formats need to be stored in a medical record department. Most departments are already deprived of space. Adding more patient data to a record or department in various multimedia formats may not be feasible in the space currently allocated to store and manage medical records. Space and storage reorganization may need to become part of the incorporation plan. A multidisciplinary team also may help tackle problems concerning space with ideas on overcoming space limitations.

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